

**Pipsan Saarinen Swanson:**

**From Interior Decorating to Mass-Produced Furnishings, ca. 1929-1955**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between designer Pipsan Saarinen Swanson's work in interiors and mass-produced furnishings. I assess how her career progressed from interior decorating, a field with many women, into areas of mass-production design with little female representation, namely furniture, lamp, metalware, and glassware. I also explore how her interiors, designed for individual clients, developed into product lines as well as brand identities aimed at national audiences. Part I of this thesis analyses Pipsan Saarinen Swanson's early design activities, including her entrance into interior decorating in 1929. Parts II through IV focus on three lines of furnishings designed by her in partnership with various male architects in her family. I demonstrate that her interior decorating work drew her incrementally into and prepared her for mass-production work. Additionally, collaborations helped her access certain design fields and also served as gateways to independent projects. Released between 1940 and 1955, the three furnishing lines each grew out of her interiors work and, as I argue, each represented a different phase of her career in terms of her development as a designer and her visibility within family partnerships. Pipsan Saarinen Swanson's renowned father provided her with vital opportunities, but she struggled to step out of the shadow he cast over her public image. On the other hand, she relentlessly uplifted her lesser-known husband, sometimes at the expense of independent recognition. I conclude that her forays into male-dominated territory were rooted in and nurtured her work in interiors; by foregrounding her domestic interiors, she anchored her career in a realm normalized as feminine. My analysis shows that her mass-produced furnishing designs closely related to her interiors stylistically. Mediating channels, however, reframed the furnishings to better appeal to middle-class American consumers. In marketing and press, the three lines assumed identities that spoke to the times they were released: the late Depression, when discussions about shared American values poured out of popular media; immediately after World War II, when business and political elites promoted individuality, diversity, and teamwork as

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## Introduction

Pipsan Saarinen Swanson (born Finland 1905; died United States 1979) had a long and varied design career in the United States, mostly in the fields of interior, textile, and furniture design, but also in glassware, metalware, lamp, and dress design.<sup>1</sup> She exhibited her work at museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Products she designed were sold across the country, pictured in national magazines, and published in books by some of the most influential promoters of modern design.<sup>2</sup> Pipsan received four awards from the American Institute of Decorators (AID) as well as honorary membership from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Despite her accomplishments, little research has been conducted on her to date.

This oversight is due to various reasons, including historians' general neglect of women designers and certain design fields long associated with women, such as interiors and textiles—two of the earliest areas in which Pipsan worked and the ones in which she practiced the longest. Pipsan designed textiles since adolescence, and in 1929, she began designing interiors for buildings designed by her architect-husband J. Robert F. “Bob” Swanson (1900-1981). Pipsan’s career, however, was by no means restricted to fields with significant female representation. Starting in the late 1930s, after pursuing work as an interior decorator for ten years, she branched out into areas in which few women were known to work, including mass-produced furniture, glassware, metalware, and lamp

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<sup>1</sup> Because I discuss Pipsan Saarinen Swanson as well as her family members throughout this thesis, it was impossible to refer to them by their last names, as is custom in academic writing. For the sake of clarity and brevity, at the expense of formality, I chose to use first names to refer to Pipsan as well as her husband J. Robert F. “Bob” Swanson, her son Robert “Bob Jr.” Saarinen Swanson, her father Eliel Saarinen, her mother Loja Saarinen, and her brother Eero Saarinen. I use the names the individuals were known by instead of their legal names, if the two differed.

<sup>2</sup> James Ford and Katherine Morrow Ford, *Design of Modern Interiors* (New York, Architectural Book, 1942), 113; Katherine Morrow Ford and Thomas Hawk Creighton, *The American House Today* (New York: Reinhold, 1951), 37, 38, 197, 222, 228; Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), 23; George Nelson, ed., *Living Spaces*, Interiors Library (New York: Whitney, 1952), 123; George Nelson, ed. *Chairs*, Interiors Library (New York: Whitney, 1953), 134.

design. Her entry into these fields was inspired by her interior decorating work, and the resulting mass-produced furnishing designs were nationally publicized.

On three lines of mass-produced furnishings released between 1940 and 1955—Flexible Home Arrangements, the Saarinen-Swanson Group, and Sol-Air—Pipsan worked in partnership with various male family members: her husband, her renowned architect father Eliel Saarinen, and her aspiring architect son Robert “Bob Jr.” Saarinen Swanson. These three lines chart Pipsan’s changing roles in family partnerships and her career development. Studying the mediation of the three lines also grants access to understudied areas of design history, namely design from the late Depression years, when the economy began to improve and discussions about shared American values poured out of popular media; the immediate post-war years, when business and political elites promoted individuality, diversity, and teamwork as defining features of American culture; and the early Cold War years, when certain influential design writers promulgated a revisionist history of modern design, relocating its origins to pre-1900 America.

### Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to determine the relationship between Pipsan’s work in interiors and her work in mass-produced furnishings. First, how did her career develop from interior decorating into various areas of mass-produced furnishings design, especially areas with little female representation? I outline how Pipsan learned to design different product types, entered various fields of design, and received public credit for her work. I also analyse how Pipsan’s gender impacted her career trajectory, and I assess how her work and career were affected by individuals with whom she had personal and work relationships, particularly her father and husband, her two most significant collaborators. Second, how did Pipsan’s mass-produced furnishing designs relate to her interiors?

And third, how were Pipsan's modern furnishing designs branded, marketed, and portrayed in the press to appeal to national audiences?

### Parameters, sources, and methods

In this thesis, I focus on Flexible Home Arrangements, the Saarinen-Swanson Group, and Sol-Air for several reasons. All were inspired by Pipsan's interior decorating work, and each line charted her progression into various areas of mass-production design. All three lines included product types that were not often credited to women designers. Each line also involved different partnerships with male family members. These projects, therefore, offered an opportunity to analyse how Pipsan's career progressed and the ways she worked in complex and shifting personal-work relationships. Lastly, each line was branded and nationally publicised, therefore allowing me to study not only Pipsan as a woman designer, but to explore the life of her designs after they left her studio, so to speak, and took on lives of their own through various mediating channels.

The main sources for this thesis were a range of artefacts, images, primary-source texts, and oral histories. Much of this material is housed in the Cranbrook Art Museum and the Cranbrook Archives in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, primarily in the J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers and the Swanson Associates, Inc. Records, as well as the Collection of Oral History Interviews, Saarinen Family Papers, Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection, Cranbrook Foundation RG I: Office Records, and Cranbrook Academy of Art Publications, Series V: Catalogs.<sup>3</sup> Cranbrook Archives has photocopies of several archival collections, which I consulted: the Albert Christ-Janer

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<sup>3</sup> What is today called the Cranbrook Educational Community (comprising the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Cranbrook Art Museum, and other entities) was formed in 1973. Prior, the community was generally referred to as Cranbrook, the name founder George Gough Booth gave the plot of land he purchased in 1904 to build his home. In subsequent decades, Booth developed his estate into an educational and Arts and Crafts community, with various entities established over time, including the Cranbrook Foundation in 1927 and the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1932. Throughout this thesis, I use the names that were used at the time under discussion. When I refer to the community generally rather than a specific entity within it, I use the name Cranbrook.

Papers from the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art; Tiffin Glass Company papers from the Bowling Green State University Center for Archival Collections; and the Kate Thompson Bromley Papers from the Burton Historical Collection in the Detroit Public Library. Additional archival collections I utilized were the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art Aline and Eero Saarinen Papers, Lilian Swann Saarinen Papers, and several oral history interviews; the Russel Wright Papers in the Special Collections Research Center in Syracuse University Libraries; the Columbus Indiana Architectural Archives in the Bartholomew County Public Library; the Dale & Marvis Rooks Collection in the Grand Rapids Public Library; the Johnson Furniture Company Collection in the Grand Rapids Public Museum; and the Eliel Saarinen Collection in the Museum of Finnish Architecture. Leena Svinhufvud, curator at the Design Museum Helsinki, kindly directed me to specific Swedish-language documents pertaining to Pipsan, located in the Collection of Johannes Öhqvist in the National Library of Finland. Because I cannot read Swedish, Svinhufvud generously translated and shared relevant passages with me. I also studied two Saarinen family homes: Hvitträsk (constructed 1902-1903) in Kirkkonummi, Finland and the Saarinen residence (constructed 1929-1930) at Cranbrook.

To understand how Pipsan learned to design various product types, entered various fields of design, progressed in her career, and received credit for her work, I analysed the content of Pipsan's own writings, including various curricula vitae from over the years and a small number of other written statements on her work. I also analysed the content of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles that reported on Pipsan's work and sometimes quoted her. Contemporary articles were useful since Pipsan's voice and perspective are largely absent in the historical record. However, I relied on contemporary periodicals with caution; newspapers in particular are not always accurate. I therefore corroborated newspaper articles with other evidence, and I did not rely on any single periodical alone to draw conclusions. I also utilised contemporary press articles and advertisements



to detail how Pipsan and her work were portrayed and credited publicly, bearing in mind that credit lines in publicity do not necessarily reflect the credit line specified by the designers. Other marketing materials such as a promotional booklet, presentation scripts, and a sales training manual along with contemporary exhibition catalogues and design books provided additional information on how Pipsan received credit for her work and how her design work was mediated to the public.

I analysed personal correspondence to ascertain Pipsan's career development and how her personal-work relationships impacted her work and career development. I also analysed Pipsan's and Bob's business correspondence with manufacturers, distributors, and editors as well as Pipsan's interior decorating itemisations and invoices to delineate her career development and to determine the relationship between her mass-produced furnishings designs and her interiors.

Stylistic comparison factored largely in my interpretation throughout this thesis. I consider "stylistic comparison" to mean comparing one artefact or ensembles of artefacts with another, identifying similarities in one or more of the following qualities: object type, fabrication technique, form, motif, material, colour, value, finish, and/or composition. I compared the style of Pipsan's design work as well as the design activities she engaged in with the style and activities of her parents to understand how they served as role models and influenced her career development and the style of her work. Art and architectural historians' research on Eliel's work and career, which also touches on Pipsan's mother the designer-sculptor Loja Saarinen, helped me speculate how they both influenced Pipsan's work and career. I focused more on Eliel's stylistic influence than Loja's because much of Pipsan's early work was for projects headed by Eliel and because the first mass-produced furnishings line Pipsan was involved in was co-designed with him. Comparing Pipsan's work with Loja's proved challenging because Loja has not been thoroughly studied. Moreover, much of Loja's known work was on projects that were credited to and/or headed by Eliel, so it is often difficult to isolate her contributions.

I also compared Pipsan's design work and/or activities with other contemporary designers for various reasons: to consider how part of Pipsan's design training was to learn by emulation; to identify a possible role model for Pipsan's career development; to determine the design trends and styles Pipsan aligned with; to determine the design trends and styles the marketers aimed to align Pipsan's mass-produced furnishing designs with; and to understand why Pipsan discussed her work the way she did. Additionally, comparing the style of Pipsan's interior decorating work with her mass-produced furnishing designs helped me interpret her career development from the former into the latter and allowed me to evaluate how her mass-produced furnishing designs related to her interiors.

My inquiry into how Pipsan's gender impacted her career assumes gender to be a social and cultural construction.<sup>4</sup> I contextualized Pipsan's activities as well as how she wrote about her work and career using feminist art, design, and craft histories, research on other women makers, and women's history.

I consulted oral histories conducted in years past by researchers who interviewed Pipsan's family members, colleagues, and friends. These interviews, many with individuals now deceased, provided insight into Pipsan's career development and how her work and career were affected by her personal-work relationships. This insight was valuable because I was not able to locate any living employee or colleague of Pipsan besides her son Bob Jr. I conducted interviews with him as well as Pipsan's architect granddaughter Karen Swanson. All oral histories have their limitations because memory can be unreliable, and a granddaughter's memories and view of her grandmother and a son's memories and view of his mother provide a subjective and limited perspective. For example, a son's impression of his mother's experience as a woman designer and work partner of male family

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the social and cultural construction of gender, see Mara Viveros Vigoya, "Sex/Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 852-73.

members, including himself, cannot stand in for Pipsan's own experience in a patriarchal society. I therefore weighed individuals' memories against other evidence to draw conclusions. I also used oral histories to provide an intimate perspective on Pipsan as well as family members and friends with whom she worked.

I utilized economic histories to consider how Pipsan's personal-work relationships impacted her work and career, how her mass-produced furnishings design related to her interiors, and how her modern furnishing designs were mediated to appeal to national audiences. To analyse the mediation of Pipsan's work, I also contextualized marketing and press materials on the furnishing lines within social, cultural, women's, political, and design histories. Sometimes existing design historical or other historical scholarship did not provide adequate context on interiors and furnishings in the United States at the times under consideration. In such cases, I turned to contemporary design books, exhibition catalogues, product catalogues, periodicals, and government documents.

To gain a thorough understanding of furnishing design and interior decorating from the late 1920s to the mid-1950s, the span of time covered by this thesis, I conducted a review of major design and shelter magazines: *Better Homes & Gardens*, *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *House & Garden*, and *Interiors*. This review also helped me determine how visible Pipsan's work was at the time it was designed and how it was discussed by editors and journalists. With hundreds of thousands of subscribers across the country, these magazines possessed some power to establish trends and influence how people viewed various design styles. The magazines could also encourage readers to purchase products and instruct them on how to live with them (i.e., where to use them and how to style them in their homes).<sup>5</sup> As sources, however, they have limitations. The content of these

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<sup>5</sup> *House Beautiful* had over 240,000 subscribers in 1940 and 400,000 subscribers in 1947. In 1956 the magazine claimed a readership of 3.25 million people. *House & Garden* had 405,104 subscribers in 1950. *Better Homes & Gardens* boasted 1,700,000 subscribers in 1938; 3,000,000 subscribers in 1947; and over 3,800,000 in 1954. Unlike the three

periodicals represented the agendas, values, and personal preferences of the journalists, editors, and publishers. Ultimately, their goal was to produce content that enticed people to buy their magazine. The content, therefore, did not necessarily reflect real people's lived experiences, but rather presented entertaining, aspirational, and idealized versions of white middle-class culture full of fantasy and novelty.

To guide my research, I found a useful framework in Grace Lees-Maffei's article "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm" in the *Journal of Design History*.<sup>6</sup> She considers production, mediation, and consumption to be three focal points for design historians. Production focuses on designed objects as well as people (especially designers and manufacturers) and issues related to the realization of designed objects, while consumption refers to the purchase and use of products. My questions about Pipsan's career and work development fall on the production side of the paradigm. My questions about the branding, marketing, and press coverage of Pipsan's work fall under mediation, which Lees-Maffei considers to be the space between production and consumption: channels that expose consumers and the public to designed objects. Mediating channels include marketing materials (e.g., photographs of model rooms, advertisements, presentation scripts, promotional booklets, and sales training manuals); press (e.g., magazine and newspaper articles), and other forms of publicity (e.g., contemporary design books, exhibitions, and exhibition catalogues). Through these mediating channels, designers and manufacturers as well as

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aforementioned general-audience magazines, *Interiors* was a specialists' publication targeted towards interior designers, architects engaged in interior design work, industrial designers, furnishing designers, and retail executives working in home furnishings. *Interiors'* total paid circulation was 3,000 in 1940, increasing to 19,590 in 1953. *House Beautiful* advertisement, *Advertising Age*, Oct. 21, 1940, 21; *House Beautiful* advertisement, *Printer's Ink*, Nov. 29 1946, 11; *House Beautiful* advertisement, *Interiors*, June 1956, 78; Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck, eds., *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 151; *Better Homes & Gardens* advertisement, *Better Homes & Gardens*, July 1938, 54; *Better Homes & Gardens* advertisement, *Better Homes & Gardens*, Oct. 1938, 82; "Your Home is Where Our Heart is: On Better Homes & Gardens' 25th Birthday," *Better Homes & Gardens*, Sept. 1947, 28; Cover, *Better Homes & Gardens*, March 1954; Charles E. Whitney, "A Symbol, and its Lessons," *Interiors* 113, no. 3 (Oct. 1953): 44.

<sup>6</sup> Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 4 (Dec. 2009): 351-76.

graphic designers, marketing and advertising executives, curators, photographers, editors, journalists, and distributors imparted values and meaning onto designed products, helping to form the product's, line's, or business's brand identity and convey it to consumers.

### Literature review

Scholarship on Pipsan's career and her work has thus far focused on issues of production. Curators Christa C. Mayer Thurman and R. Craig Miller first researched Pipsan's life and career by studying the Cranbrook Archives. Their work appeared in the 1983 exhibition catalogue *Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision, 1925-1950*.<sup>7</sup> Thurman, in her chapter on textiles, provides some details on Pipsan's role in the early development of Cranbrook, including her participation in Eliel's interiors there, and some of her mass-production work.<sup>8</sup> R. Craig Miller also provides some information on Pipsan's contributions to Eliel's Cranbrook interiors in his chapter on interior design and furniture.<sup>9</sup> The "Biographies" section of the catalogue sketches out a chronology of Pipsan's career.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the catalogue, the discussions of Pipsan and her work are brief, understandably so given the large purview of the catalogue and the fact that much of her work was not related to Cranbrook, therefore outside the scope of the project. Reflecting the state of decorative arts scholarship at the time, authors provide a straight-forward report of their findings in the archives, with a focus on formal description and attribution. The information presented on Pipsan begs for critical analysis and contextualization. Since the time *Design in America* was published, additional archival material relevant to Pipsan has been donated to the Cranbrook archives by the Swanson family. A close

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Judson Clark et al., eds., *Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision, 1925-1950* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Christa C. Mayer Thurman, "Textiles," in *Design in America*, 188-89.

<sup>9</sup> R. Craig Miller, "Interior Design and Furniture," in *Design in America*, 93, 98-99.

<sup>10</sup> "Biographies of the Artists," in *Design in America*, 273-74.

reading of the archives in full points out the need to revise some information published in the catalogue on Pipsan's early career, namely her involvement in the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

Subsequent research on Pipsan was conducted by Ashley Callahan (née Brown) when she was a Collections Intern at Cranbrook Art Museum. In 1999, she wrote an exhibition pamphlet on Pipsan that provides additional details about her major projects and accolades.<sup>11</sup> Callahan also presented a three-page conference paper on Pipsan's screen-printed textiles designed for the Saarinen-Swanson Group in 1947.<sup>12</sup> A decorative-arts historian, Callahan adopted a similar approach as writers in *Design in America* by focusing on recovery and description over analysis and contextualization. Callahan also likewise highlights Pipsan's work in textiles.

Previously unpublished details on Pipsan's personal-work relationships appear in two works on Pipsan's brother, architect-designer Eero Saarinen: architectural historian Jayne Merkel's 2005 monograph *Eero Saarinen* and Mark Coir's chapter in the 2006 exhibition catalogue *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*, edited by Donald Albrecht and Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen.<sup>13</sup> Merkel's account does not always include citations where they are needed. She appears to rely solely on an unpublished monograph by Coir, Director of Cranbrook Archives from 1983 to 2008. Coir, in his chapter in *Shaping the Future*, provides a highly interpretive account of fraught Saarinen family relationships, claiming to know the feelings of various individuals without providing evidence, or appropriate evidence, to support his claims. Because Coir deviates from conventional scholarly standards, his claims, as well as research that relies on Coir's research, must be re-evaluated.

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<sup>11</sup> Ashley Brown, *Backgrounds for Modern Living: Furniture, Textile and Fashion Designs by Pipsan Saarinen Swanson* (Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook Art Museum, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Brown, "Examining Mid-Century Decorative Arts: Pipsan Saarinen Swanson's Printed Textiles for the Saarinen Swanson Group" (Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, 2000), paper 789.

<sup>13</sup> Jayne Merkel, *Eero Saarinen* (New York: Phaidon, 2005), 23; Mark Coir, "The Cranbrook Factor," in *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*, eds. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Donald Albrecht (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 29-44.

In the 2000 exhibition catalogue *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference* Pipsan is briefly discussed in three chapters, for which authors considered previous scholarship from a feminist perspective. In the introduction, Pat Kirkham and Lynne Walker raise questions about how Pipsan dealt with a collaborator/husband who felt overshadowed by her as well as how she handled working in the shadow of a famous father and brother.<sup>14</sup> The chapter by Ella Howard and Eric Setliff on industrial design and Kirkham and Penny Sparke's chapter on interior design from 1900 to 1950 acknowledge the gendered nature of many design activities Pipsan undertook as well as ways she pressed the boundaries of feminine work.<sup>15</sup> The scholars writing in *Women Designers in the USA* depart from previous work on Pipsan by placing her activities in the broader context of women working in various fields of design and working collaboratively with male family members. They also expand the focus of Pipsan's career beyond (feminine) textiles, addressing the fact that Pipsan was active in other areas of design. Extending beyond acts of straight-forward recovery, authors scrutinize how Pipsan and other women came to be designers. They consider how designers' gender affected their professional trajectories. Authors also address how educational opportunities, the collaborative nature of many types of design, customs of assigning credit, and other factors shaped women's participation and visibility in the design world. In this thesis, I continue to develop the issues that these historians identify about Pipsan's career, collaborations, and activity in design fields with little female representation. Additionally, I consider how formal training prepared Pipsan to work in various fields of design, and I investigate other ways

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<sup>14</sup> Pat Kirkham and Lynne Walker, "Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference," in *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press published for the Bard Graduate Center, 2000), 68-70.

<sup>15</sup> Ella Howard and Eric Setliff, "In 'A Man's World': Women Industrial Designers," in *Women Designers in the USA*, 77, 79; Kirkham and Penny Sparke, "'A Woman's Place...?': Women Interior Designers: 1900-1950," in *Women Designers in the USA*, 315.

Pipsan learned to design different types of furnishings and secured opportunities to work as a designer in various fields, especially in fields gendered as male or dominated by men.

My inquiry into the impact of Pipsan's gender on her career relies on research—in *Women Designers in the USA* and elsewhere—on how certain art, craft, and design activities came to be gendered or associated with women in Western culture. Textile crafts, for one, have long been gendered as female. Elizabeth Wayland Barber contends that, in societies centred around household production, women were typically responsible for spinning yarn, weaving, and sewing because those activities were practiced in the home, where women breastfed and cared for young children. The practice of textile crafts also posed little danger to children and was amenable to frequent interruptions.<sup>16</sup> In Western Europe since antiquity, textiles were also sometimes produced in dedicated workshops; David Herlihy has shown that from then into the Middle Ages, workers in these workshops were typically women. But by the thirteenth century in some cities, men were entering textile production in increasing numbers, and by the fifteenth-century, largely through guild regulations, women were being pushed out or limited to certain tasks that were thought to require less strength or expertise.<sup>17</sup> Roszika Parker's research into the history of English embroidering has revealed that, in the Middle Ages, both men and women worked as embroiderers; noble women also directed their own embroidery workshops and participated in the work. In the Early Modern period, in imitation of noblewomen, increasing numbers of merchant-class women practiced needle crafts in their homes as a pastime. With a shift away from an economy centred around household production, the home became idealized as a place where, if the husband was successful, a wife spent

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 29-33.

<sup>17</sup> David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990).



her days in leisure. Concurrently, needle crafts were increasingly associated with amateurism and femininity.<sup>18</sup>

Fashion became gendered as female in eighteenth-century France, according to Jennifer Jones. Amid a burgeoning consumer culture, fashion came to be regarded as a specifically feminine pursuit with frivolous connotations, framed as such in the nascent fashion press and by women's growing presence in the fashion trades.<sup>19</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, as documented by Philippe Perrot, Western women's mainstream dress had come to be characterized by more decoration and colour as well as faster and more dramatic changes in trends than menswear, thereby reinforcing the feminine as well as ephemeral and frivolous connotations of fashion.<sup>20</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, certain crafts came within the ambit of acceptable female pursuits, largely thanks to the Arts and Crafts Movement, as Anthea Callen has shown. Prior, nineteenth-century middle-class mores deemed it inappropriate for married women to work outside the home or for pay. The Arts and Crafts Movement validated traditional handcrafts and home furnishings design as honourable work, and some craft workshops that sprang up offered opportunities for middle-class women to respectably work for pay.<sup>21</sup> Pattern design for textiles and wallpaper came to be associated with women in large part due to the work of Candace Wheeler, a prominent American associated with the movement, who has been most thoroughly researched by Amelia Peck and Carol Irish.<sup>22</sup> Two-dimensional pattern design was similar to activities that had already become widely accepted as appropriate leisure activities for middle- and upper-middle class

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<sup>18</sup> Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), first published 1984 by The Women's Press.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Anthea Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870-1914*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Amelia Peck and Carol Irish, *Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875-1900* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

women to practice in their homes, namely small-scale artworks such as watercolour and drawing. Linda Nochlin and Laura R. Prieto have demonstrated that, in the nineteenth century, skills used in executing such works were thought to demonstrate genteel accomplishment and refinement. Women were able to practice such clean and odourless amateur pursuits with ease in their homes; moreover, they were not so demanding that they detracted a woman from her duties to her family and household, but rather were thought to provide a focus for a wandering mind.<sup>23</sup> Drawing and painting was also related to the work women first did in commercial potteries as “decorators” or “china painters,” individuals who painted two-dimensional surface decoration onto vessels typically thrown or otherwise designed and shaped by men. Requiring a delicate hand, china painting was considered suitable work for women, who were assumed to have small, nimble fingers. Women working as china painters paved the way for select women to branch beyond surface decoration at the turn of the century to become ceramicists who developed innovative forms and glazes, to wide acclaim.<sup>24</sup>

Callen has shown that, in the late nineteenth century, some individuals associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement believed that small-scale metalworking (in precious and other non-ferrous metals) were suitable to women’s small, dextrous hands.<sup>25</sup> Such work was less physically demanding than other crafts such as metal forging (with ferrous metals) or woodworking, for example. Jeannine Falino’s research demonstrates that, in the 1910s and 1920s in the United States, it became more common for women to engage in small-scale metalworking. Some regarded female metalworkers as modern and progressive “new women,” who were making inroads into an area

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<sup>23</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ARTnews*, Jan. 1971, 22-39, 67-71, republished on ARTnews.com, 30 May 2015. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/>; Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22-25.

<sup>24</sup> Callen, *Women Artists*, 52-93.

<sup>25</sup> Callen, 155-62.

traditionally associated with men.<sup>26</sup> Yet, women's participation in metalworking was still not readily accepted in some of the most progressive design circles of the day. According to Anja Baumhoff's research on the women at the Bauhaus, in the mid-1920s, Marianne Brandt felt that women were not welcome in the school's metal workshop.<sup>27</sup> Setliff and Howard, in *Women Designers in the USA*, have researched the fields of mass-produced metalware as well as glassware and other products. They found that some of the few women active in these areas viewed the fields as male-dominated, and that men were sometimes resistant to work with them or otherwise treated them discriminately because of their gender.<sup>28</sup>

Interior decorating was another activity that came to be associated with women starting in the late nineteenth century. Isabelle Anscombe, Adrian Forty, and Peter McNeil have found evidence that, before the middle of the century, when a middle-class couple made their own decorating decisions, the task often fell to the husband, possibly because furnishings were large expenditures and intended to last a lifetime. The wife, on the other hand, often made some soft textile furnishings for her home. In the last quarter of the century, however, larger quantities of less expensive furnishings came onto the market and home furnishings started to be viewed as less permanent. From then on, middle-class housewives were typically responsible for making home furnishing purchases, and such decisions were thought to express their own and their family's identities. Home decorating became a popular pastime for middle-class women, in part because women were thought to be intuitive, sensitive to colour, and naturally inclined to decorate. Women were energized to take greater initiative in the decoration of their homes by a large number of decorating manuals published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these

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<sup>26</sup> Jeannine Falino, "Women Metalsmiths," in *Women Designers in the USA*, 223-46.

<sup>27</sup> Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002), 138-43.

<sup>28</sup> Howard and Setliff, "In 'A Man's World,'" 272-73, 279.

writings were penned by women, some of whom worked for pay as interior decorators and claimed the occupation to be a woman's field.<sup>29</sup>

A similar gender shift had occurred among individuals who were paid to design interiors for other peoples' homes. Kirkham and Sparke have written that, into the early twentieth century in the United States, most of these individuals were men who worked primarily as architects, antiques dealers, upholsterers, or furnishing retailers. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, interior decorating as a discrete activity began to gain currency as an acceptable occupation for middle- and upper-class women in large part thanks to prominent women associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, especially Candace Wheeler, who worked as interior decorators and urged other women to follow suit. By the 1920s it was common for interior decorators to be female. A number of high-profile decorators were women, among them Elsie de Wolfe, Ruby Ross Wood, Eleanor McMillen, Rose Cumming, Nancy McClelland, and Dorothy Draper.<sup>30</sup> Women had established such a presence in the field by the 1930s that Billy Baldwin, one of the most well-known decorators of the mid-twentieth century, saw few male peers.<sup>31</sup> In the post-war period, many men trained in and practiced in the field, some with high public profiles, but the occupation continued to carry feminine connotations, as shown by the research of Judith Gura and Sparke.<sup>32</sup>

Furniture making and furniture design were long gendered as male. Kirkham has provided an overview and analysis of women's little involvement in furniture making in Britain from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. In addition to the belief that men were better suited to such arduous work because of their generally larger physique, furniture making was also messy, and

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<sup>29</sup> Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 68-72; Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 104-107; Peter McNeil, "Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator, c. 1890-1940," *Art History* 17, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>30</sup> Pat Kirkham and Penny Sparke, "'A Woman's Place...?' Women Interior Designers, Part I: 1900-1950" in *Women Designers in the USA*, 305-12.

<sup>31</sup> McNeil, "Designing Women," 653n9.

<sup>32</sup> Judith B. Gura, "'A Woman's Place...?' Women Interior Designers, 1950-2000," in *Women Designers in the USA*, 317; Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 186-88.

therefore the work was contrary to Medieval notions of femininity that associated cleanliness and delicateness with women. Of the few women known to have worked in furniture making from then into the twentieth century, many were wives of furniture makers or daughters of furniture makers who had no sons. As of the late seventeenth century, women were more active in furniture upholstery—the part of furniture making that involved textile work—more than any other area.<sup>33</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the United States, according to Callen, furniture carving was a craft practiced by some women, mostly in an amateur capacity.<sup>34</sup> Edward Cooke has researched women furniture makers and designers in twentieth-century America. The few women who are known to have engaged in furniture design in the early twentieth century typically designed carved ornaments or two-dimensional painted surface decoration rather than the overall form or structure of a piece. In the interwar period, most designers of mass-produced furniture were men. Cooke determined that of the few women in the field, the prominent designers Virginia Conner and Bertha Schaefer began their careers in interior decorating before working as mass-produced furniture designers.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Freda Diamond worked as an interior decorator before branching out into the design of mass-produced furniture and other furnishings.<sup>36</sup> Pipsan also followed this pattern. Concerning the women who made the leap from interior decorating to mass-produced furnishings design in the interwar period, the relationship between their interior and product designs has not been analysed. Nor have historians studied the nature of these women's career transition from a field associated with women to ones dominated by men.

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<sup>33</sup> Pat Kirkham, "If You Have No Sons': Furniture-Making in Britain," in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 109-30.

<sup>34</sup> Callen, *Women Artists*, 169-71.

<sup>35</sup> Edward S. Cooke Jr., "Women Furniture Makers: From Decorative Designers to Studio Makers," in *Women Designers in the USA*, 291-96.

<sup>36</sup> Howard and Setliff, "In 'A Man's World,'" 279; Estelle Hamburger, *It's a Woman's Business* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), 218-21, 239; Elizabeth Dunn, "Designing Woman," *The Guardian*, 17 May 1972.

Although interior decorating and mass-produced furnishings design were related, the work in each area was fundamentally different, requiring different knowledge bases, involving different processes, and posing different design problems. An interior decorator typically procured and arranged furnishings (including furniture, rugs, curtains, lighting fixtures, and wall coverings) harmoniously in an architectural space. Interior decorators also often sourced labour to execute or install various furnishings and coordinated and oversaw the work. To accomplish this, an interior decorator needed to possess a network of vendors and contractors in addition to a knowledge of colour, materials, and design styles.<sup>37</sup> Decorating a residential interior was necessarily a custom design project, in that the design was intended to address the needs, values, and tastes of one client, usually an upper-middle- or upper-class client. On the other hand, mass-produced furnishings were typically aimed at a wider socio-economic group, and in order to succeed on the market, the products needed to appeal to large numbers of people. The mass-produced furnishings designer had to understand the potential and limitations of the materials and production methods involved in a given product type as well as performance and technical considerations, such as how to design a chair that could bear the load of a human body or a wine glass with a stem that did not snap off upon impact. Designing a mass-produced object was a different exercise than designing a room or house, and interior decorating work did not necessarily prepare someone with the skills to design furnishings, let alone mass-produced furnishings.

Hungarian émigré Ilonka Karasz's career demonstrated a comparable gender shift, beginning in design areas associated with women and then expanding into male domains. Using archival material, contemporary articles, and interviews with Karasz's family members, Ashley Callahan

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<sup>37</sup> J. B. H., "What is an Interior Decorator?" *Upholsterer and the Interior Decorator* 73 (15 Aug. 1924): 82; "Branching into Interior Decoration," *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 88, no. 4 (15 April 1932): 39, 71; "Then and Now," *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 91, no. 6 (15 Dec. 1933): 31, 78; Dan Cooper, "What is a Decorator?" *Interiors* 106, no. 1 (Aug. 1946): 74, 132-42.

wrote the exhibition catalogue *Enchanting Modern: Ilonka Karasz*. According to her research, Karasz's earliest known design work, executed in the 1910s after immigrating to New York, were textile designs and other two-dimensional works such illustrations and decorative book borders. Callahan's research reveals that Karasz secured early opportunities to publicize these designs by forming a society, which published a periodical and established a design consultancy—in partnership with men. By the late 1920s, more than ten years after Karasz began designing mass-produced textiles, she had branched out into furnishing design fields with little female representation, namely furniture, lamp, and metalware design.<sup>38</sup> Callahan, however, does not discuss the gendered nature of various fields in which Karasz worked, the gender shift in her career development, or the significance of working in partnership with men. Callahan also neglects to address how Karasz learned to design furniture, lamps, and metalware, and it is unclear how she gained access to work in those fields.

In the second and third quarters of the twentieth century, a number of prominent women furnishing designers worked in collaboration with their husbands or other men. This thesis adds to the body of literature on these partnerships, especially regarding the public portrayal of the woman's role. For a designer, receiving public credit resulted in recognition, and recognition resulted in opportunity. Credit lines and public visibility were especially important for women's progress gaining entry to fields with little female representation; public recognition provided role models for future generations and helped destabilize essentialist notions that the genders were inherently suited to particular types of work.<sup>39</sup> Historians have broached some husband-wife and male-female teams from a feminist perspective by reassessing women's contributions to joint work and work credited to the male partner alone, and considering the factors that limited the woman's visibility in the

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<sup>38</sup> Ashley Callahan, *Enchanting Modern: Ilonka Karasz (1896-1981)* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, "Introduction," in *A View from the Interior*, 2.

partnerships and sources of female oppression—whether they were from inside or outside the partnership.

In an exhibition catalogue on Finnish architect-designer Aino Marsio-Aalto, who worked in partnership with her architect-designer husband Alvar Aalto, Mia Hipeli has shown that some of the Aaltos' projects were officially credited with husband and wife as co-architects, yet many others were credited as the work of "Alvar Aalto Architects," the name of the architecture office. In a number of press statements, Alvar specified Aino's contributions to projects led by him. Sometimes magazines credited projects as he requested, giving Aino joint credit or specifying her role; other times they glossed over Aino's contributions or mis-credited the work to Alvar alone.<sup>40</sup>

Pat Kirkham has researched the husband-wife partnership of Ray and Charles Eames using archival material and conducting interviews with Ray Eames as well as family members and former colleagues. Kirkham shows that Ray's role was far greater than the extent to which she was credited during her career, demonstrating that forces from both inside and outside the partnership resulted in skewed credit. Inner-partnership forces include the gender normative roles Charles and Ray Eames adopted in their relationship: Charles was the public face of the partnership, played the role of office head, and was self-centred and controlling in nature, while Ray sought Charles' protection, was shy in public, and directed her career in response to Charles' interests. For the first seven years of their partnership, work was submitted under Charles' name alone; thereafter they credited their design work as Eames Office. When discussing his collaborative work with Ray, Charles repeatedly attempted to share credit with Ray and correct gender-normative assumptions about their partnership, but commentators and critics (extra-partnership forces) nonetheless foregrounded Charles.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Mia Hipeli, "List of Works," in *Aino Aalto*, ed. Ulla Kinnunen (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2004), 62-85.

<sup>41</sup> Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).



A number of authors have interviewed architect-designer Lella Vignelli on her partnership with her architect-designer husband Massimo Vignelli: Kirkham and Melissa Seiler; Samira Bouabana and Angela Tillman Sperandio; and Jan Conradi.<sup>42</sup> Architect-designer Denise Scott Brown has written about her own experience working in partnership with her architect-designer husband Robert Venturi, and she was also interviewed by journalist Andrea Gabor.<sup>43</sup> Lella Vignelli's and Scott Brown's collaborative work with their husbands was not always credited the way they specified. Both women have explained that publishers and critics sometimes foregrounded the male partners' name or discussed joint work as if it was the man's alone; other times their own work was outright mis-credited as their husbands'. Both women also felt that they, at times, were expected to play gender normative roles when collaborating with their husbands, and that their lack of credit and/or opportunity was, in part, due to decisions made by their husbands.<sup>44</sup> Scott Brown felt that she prioritized her responsibilities as wife and mother over her own career ambitions. She believed that by working in partnership with her husband, she forfeited the opportunity to be recognized as an architect in her own right.<sup>45</sup> The research on Scott Brown, Lella Vignelli, and Ray Eames is especially important to feminist design history scholarship because the researchers conducted interviews with the women—and in the case of Scott Brown she wrote of her experience herself. The same cannot be said for older designers such as Pipsan, who died in 1979, before feminist design historians began attempting to redress the record. For all of these women, their personal-work relationships impacted

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<sup>42</sup> Pat Kirkham, Melissa W. M. Seiler, and Lella Vignelli, "Lella Vignelli on Vignelli: Design History, Concepts, and Collaboration," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 8, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2000-2001): 139-52; Samira Bouabana and Angela Tillman Sperandio, "Preface," in *Hall of Femmes: Lella Vignelli*, ed. Sarah Clyne Sundberg (Nacka: Oyster Press, 2013), 4-5; Jan Conradi, *Lella and Massimo Vignelli: Two Lives, One Vision* (Rochester: RIT Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Denise Scott Brown, "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, eds. Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 237-46; Andrea Gabor, *Einstein's Wife: Work and Marriage in the Lives of Five Great Twentieth-Century Women* (New York: Viking, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Kirkham, Seiler, and Vignelli, 144, 147-48; Scott Brown, "Room at the Top?"; Gabor, *Einstein's Wife*, 202-203; Conradi, 33; Bouabana and Sperandio, 5, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Gabor, *Einstein's Wife*, 161, 191.

the development of their careers and their accomplishments were often overshadowed by their husbands' high public profiles.

Mary McLeod has researched the visibility of French designer Charlotte Perriand, who designed furniture independently and also in Le Corbusier's architecture office from the late 1920s. Perriand and Le Corbusier, sometimes with other designers including Pierre Jeanneret, worked in close collaboration on certain designs. One chair that she alone designed was erroneously marketed by the manufacturer as co-designed with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret. On another occasion, a chair was credited in a contemporary exhibition and other publicity solely to Perriand, but later came to be known as the work of Le Corbusier. McLeod found that Perriand herself never expressed that she felt Le Corbusier did not properly credit her.<sup>46</sup>

Pipsan's male partner—her husband—never attained the same national or international renown as Le Corbusier, Charles Eames, Alvar Aalto, or others. I consider how his relatively small stature in the design world as well as his financial situation impacted Pipsan's career development and how their collaborative work was publicly portrayed. Pipsan's father, on the other hand, with whom she also worked collaboratively, was very well known; I ask how his reputation affected her public visibility. Pipsan is additionally unusual among women designers because she eventually worked collaboratively with yet another male family member—her son. Studying how Pipsan navigated these various partnerships as a daughter, wife, and mother helps to create a fuller and more complex understanding of women's careers as designers and the public representation of their work. Like previous historians, I scrutinize the ways that credit lines obscured Pipsan's role in partnerships, while also considering how credit lines helped Pipsan negotiate her own achievements with her obligations as wife and mother.

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<sup>46</sup> Mary McLeod, "Charlotte Perriand: Her First Decade as a Designer," *AA Files*, no. 15 (1987): 3-13; Mary McLeod, "New Designs for Living: Domestic Equipment of Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, and Pierre Jeanneret, 1928-28," in *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living*, ed. Mary McLeod (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 36-67.

The furnishings lines analysed in chapters 3 through 8 address other understudied areas of design history: the mediation of mass-produced modern furnishings in the United States during the late Depression, immediate post-war, and early Cold War years. Kristina Wilson's 2004 exhibition catalogue *Livable Modernism* focuses on modern furnishings aimed at the American middle-class market during the Depression, and part of her analysis is on the marketing and press material on such furnishings.<sup>47</sup> Wilson pays special attention to the design and mediation of furniture by Gilbert Rohde and Russel Wright, both of whom designed multipurpose-modular lines similar in concept, style, and brand identity as Flexible Home Arrangements (1940), the subject of chapters 3 and 4 in this thesis. Concerning the mediation of Rohde's, Wright's, and other modern furnishing lines, Wilson focuses most on how marketing and press promoted the functional value of modern furnishings, yet she also touches on ways that marketing and press associated modern design with historical furniture. Donald Albrecht, Robert Schonfeld, and Lindsay Stamm Shapiro, in the 2001 exhibition catalogue *Russel Wright: Creating American Lifestyle*, also analyse how Wright's modern designs were mediated.<sup>48</sup> All of the authors (including Wilson) agree that references to historical furniture were meant to make modern design seem more familiar during the unstable Depression years. They rightly address that marketing associated Wright's designs specifically with American history and notions of American-ness to try to make modern design appeal to popular taste, which favoured Colonial Revival furnishings. In this thesis, I elaborate on the Americanization of modern design in the Depression decade. I also consider the vicissitudes of the 1930s, focusing on the specific circumstances in the years around 1940, when the Flexible Home Arrangements line was designed and publicized.

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<sup>47</sup> Kristina Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating and Design during the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Donald Albrecht, Bob Schonfeld, and Lindsay Stamm Shapiro, eds., *Russel Wright: Creating American Lifestyle* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2001).

Chapters 5 and 6, on the Saarinen-Swanson Group (1947), contributes to the body of research addressing the mediation of modern design associated with the post-war Craft Revival. The 2011 exhibition catalogue *Crafting Modernism* provides a broad overview of the Craft Revival in post-war America. Glenn Adamson's, Jennifer Scanlon's, and Donald Albrecht's chapters detail the presence of craft in post-war modern design and delineate the figure of the designer-craftsman.<sup>49</sup> Adamson's and Albrecht's chapters show that exhibitions and publications celebrated and promoted craft-inflected modern design to the public and encouraged a union between handcraft and industry. Both authors also touch on connections between craft and socio-political contexts, arguing that the Craft Revival countered what many saw as a diminishing and/or threatened sense of individuality in American culture. In a chapter in the 2011 exhibition catalogue *Living in a Modern Way: California Design, 1930-1965*, Adamson demonstrates that California was a hotbed of designer-craftsmen activity. He argues that this was the case because the state was populated with many small manufacturers, grass-roots entrepreneurs, and craftspeople who were interested in serial and mechanized production; this confluence of factors encouraged bridges to be built between the craft studio and the factory.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, I shift the geographic focus to Midwest America while narrowing the timeframe to the years right after the war to consider why that time and place participated in and fed the nascent designer-craftsperson trend. Unlike Adamson's, Albrecht's, and Scanlon's research, I focus on the brand identity and marketing of one line of craft-inflected modern furnishings.

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<sup>49</sup> Glenn Adamson, "Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement," in *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*, ed. Jeannine Falino (New York: Abrams in association with the Museum of Arts and Design, 2011), 32-55; Donald Albrecht, "The Hand that Helped the Machine," in *Crafting Modernism*, 84-97; Jennifer Scanlon, "Handmade Modernism: Craft in Industry in the Postwar Period," in *Crafting Modernism*, 98-119.

<sup>50</sup> Glenn Adamson, "Serious Business: The 'Designer-Craftsman' in Postwar California," in *Living in a Modern Way: California Design, 1930-1965*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Cambridge: MIT Press in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 203-31.

Certain research on specific designers have also laid other groundwork for my analysis of the Saarinen-Swanson Group branding, marketing, and press. Kirkham, in her work on the Eameses, considers their post-war modern designs to be in many ways a continuation of the aims, ideals, and ethics of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which historians previously assumed to be long dead by the 1940s.<sup>51</sup> She argues that certain Arts and Crafts values (honesty of construction, truth to materials, and joy in labour) permeated the Eameses design approach and process. Kirkham also points out that the Eameses studied and worked at Cranbrook Academy of Art, which when it was founded had ties with the Arts and Crafts Movement. In this thesis, I probe the connection between Cranbrook's Arts and Crafts roots and post-war modern design, but rather than focusing on how Arts and Crafts values influenced the design process and approach of modernist designers, I focus on how the Arts and Crafts Movement was referenced in the brand identity of Pipsan's and her collaborators' modern furnishings. Along this same line, Regina Lee Blaszczyk, in an article on modernist designer-weaver Dorothy Liebes, argues that craft was utilized in the marketing of Liebes' designs to counter the negative image of industrially made products. Liebes' identity as a stylish, high-end handweaver served to elevate the image of synthetic fibres, which carried scientific and low-quality associations.<sup>52</sup> I extend beyond this by examining the context of the 1940s and considering other reasons craft could help the public image of mass-produced furnishings at that time.

Chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis, on Sol-Air (1950), adds to the body of scholarship on the mediation of post-war modern design in the United States. The style of Sol-Air furniture fits within the scope of the 2001 exhibition catalogue *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age*,

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<sup>51</sup> Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*; Pat Kirkham, "Humanizing Modernism: The Crafts, 'Functioning Decoration' and the Eameses," *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 1 (1998): 15-29.

<sup>52</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Designing Synthetics, Promoting Brands: Dorothy Liebes, DuPont Fibres and Post-war American Interiors," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 75-99.

1940-1960.<sup>53</sup> Authors Kevin L. Stayton, Paul Boyer, Mildred Friedman, and Karal Ann Marling focus on analysing the appearance of such “vital forms” in modern design, successfully arguing that forms similar to Sol-Air seats and bases referenced science, technology, biology, nature, and fine art. However, authors do not explore if or how these associations were relayed to the public. Analysis of the mediation is restricted to exhibitions and a few (mostly specialist) publications that sought to promote modern design in general, rather than the branding and marketing of particular products or lines. Friedman’s discussion of advertisements focuses on graphic design styles that aligned with the “vital” style, but prioritizes the relationship between the advertisements and fine art movements (especially Surrealism) without considering if viewers would necessarily recognize the fine art references and, if they did, what types of associations those references would impart onto the products being advertised. My research on Sol-Air, on the other hand, considers how the advertisements and other marketing and press material defined and communicated identities of such “vital” furnishings.

Monica Penick, in her work on *House Beautiful*, addresses how that magazine mediated modern design, demonstrating that it framed and promoted post-war modern design in nationalistic terms in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>54</sup> Penick focuses on architecture more than interior and furnishings design, whereas I focus on the latter. In chapter 8, I provide a broader account of nationalistic rhetoric in discourse on modern design, providing essential context to analyse the mediation of Sol-Air. Compared to the scholarship on the mediation of mass-produced modern

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<sup>53</sup> Kevin L. Stayton, “Introduction,” in *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960*, eds. Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Kevin L. Stayton (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2001), 22-35; Paul Boyer, “The United States, 1941-1963: A Historical Overview,” in *Vital Forms*, 66-74; Mildred Friedman, “From *Futurama* to *Motorama*,” in *Vital Forms*, 164-207; Karal Ann Marling, “Organic Glitz: Designing Popular Culture in the Postwar Era,” in *Vital Forms*, 208-37.

<sup>54</sup> Monica Penick, *Tastemaker: Elizabeth Gordon, House Beautiful, and the Postwar American House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

design heretofore reviewed, I more thoroughly contextualize marketing and press material within economic, social, cultural, and political history.

### Terminology

When describing Pipsan's and other relevant work, whenever possible I use the terms that she, her collaborators, or contemporaries used. In her few writings, Pipsan used the word "modern" to describe her design work from the late 1920s into the 1940s, although she did not explain what she meant by the term.<sup>55</sup> The word could mean many things at the period under consideration. In its loosest sense, "modern" simply meant "of the moment." The word was also used to refer to a range of design styles and approaches that were new to the world and in some way thought to reflect modern life. "Modern" was variously used to describe the materials, technology, functionality, and/or appearance of a given design.<sup>56</sup> As of the late 1940s, Pipsan sometimes used the word "contemporary" to refer to her present and past design work, while sometimes still using the term "modern" to refer to her past work.<sup>57</sup> Into the 1950s, marketing and press material on Pipsan's interior and furnishing designs most often described her work as "modern," sometimes using the word interchangeably with "contemporary."<sup>58</sup> Some prominent modernists also used the terms

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<sup>55</sup> Eveline Oen, "Theirs is a Life of 'Firsts'," *Birmingham Eccentric* (MI), 23 Aug. 1968; Hazel Trumble, "Pipsan Saarinen Swanson is a Designer with Purpose," *Pontiac Daily Press* (MI), 3 Nov. 1950; Pipsan to Heywood-Wakefield Company, 14 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (hereafter cited as SP); Pipsan to Witcombe, McGeachin & Co., 24 Oct. 1936, box 1, folder 19, SP; Pipsan to Hekman Furniture Co., 1 Dec. 1936, box 1, folder 20, SP; Pipsan to Stroheim & Romann, 8 April 1943, box 11, folder 7, Swanson Associates, Inc. Records, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (hereafter cited as SAR).

<sup>56</sup> See Christopher Wilk, "Introduction: What was Modernism?" in *Modernism: Designing a New World, 1914-1939*, ed. Christopher Wilk (London: V&A, 2006), 12-17.

<sup>57</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan to Ann Stacy, Executive Director, Michigan Society of Architects, 29 July 1969, box 7, folder 8, SP; Pipsan, "Look Homeward, America" project statement, 1955, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>58</sup> For example, see "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge Ideally in Saarinen-Swanson Modern," *House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 152, 156; Sol-Air advertisement, *Interiors* 110, no. 6 (Jan. 1951): 30; "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes," *Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 116-17; Pittsburgh Paint advertisement, *Better Homes & Gardens*, Feb. 1958, 37.

“modern” and “contemporary” interchangeably.<sup>59</sup> The style of Pipsan’s interior and furnishing designs transformed from the 1930s to the 1950s, as demonstrated in chapters 3 through 8. Broadly speaking, she started out in a more geometric style and gradually incorporated more curving forms. Visual commonalities that persisted across these decades included simple forms with smooth surfaces; textural textiles with stripes or flattened, abstracted patterns; and traditional materials (such as wood, ceramic, and natural-looking textiles) combined with industrial ones (such as steel, aluminium, iron, and synthetic fibres).

### Chapter summaries

The crux of this thesis is the relationship between Pipsan’s design work in interiors and her work in mass-produced furnishing design from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s. Woven throughout are the personal-work relationships that impacted that work. In order to understand how her career and work progressed as it did, from interior decorating into mass-produced furnishings design, it is necessary to first examine her earliest design activities, how she arrived at the field of interior decorating, and the backstory of Pipsan’s personal-work relationships. This I cover in Part I. Chapter 1 consists of an overview and analysis of what is known of Pipsan’s design training and early work in Finland and the United States, from childhood into the 1930s, which prepared her to work in interiors and furnishings design. Chapter 2 focuses on her early interior decorating practice, which she began in 1929 and came to focus her career on over the course of the next decade. Her decorating work from that time set the stage for her entry into mass-produced furnishings design.

In the late 1930s, Pipsan expanded the scope of her activities and began developing lines of mass-produced furnishings in collaboration with various male family members. Chapters 3 through

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<sup>59</sup> For example, see George Nelson and Henry Nicolls Wright, *Tomorrow’s House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 7, 8, 23, 24, 150.



8 of this thesis analyse three such lines with which Pipsan was involved. The subject of chapter 3 is the design of Flexible Home Arrangements, a line of multipurpose-modular wood furniture designed by Eliel, Pipsan, and Bob. Released in 1940, Flexible Home Arrangements was Pipsan's first known foray into mass-production design *and* furniture design. Chapter 4 analyses the brand identity of Flexible Home Arrangements, which spoke to social, cultural, economic, and political conditions of the late Depression years. Chapter 5 is on the design of Saarinen-Swanson Group, an extensive line of modern home furnishings released in 1947. Pipsan and Bob headed the project and designed furnishings for the line as did other individuals who studied or taught at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Through this line, Pipsan branched out independently into new fields of furnishings design: glassware, metalware, lamp, and printed textile design. Chapter 6 examines the brand identity of the Saarinen-Swanson Group, which portrayed the line as a fulfilment of Cranbrook's original Arts and Crafts goals. The subject of chapter 7 is the design and brand identity of Sol-Air, a line of indoor-outdoor furniture designed by Pipsan in collaboration with her husband and son. Released in 1950 and developed until 1955, Sol-Air was the first (and only) time Pipsan designed mass-produced metal and sling furniture. Chapter 8 scrutinizes a model home Pipsan designed for *Life* magazine and the Chicago Merchandise Mart in 1955 in which she used many Sol-Air products. *Life* magazine reframed the model interiors in a manner that departed the Sol-Air brand identity to suit the magazine's own pro-America and pro-modernism agenda.

After Pipsan designed Sol-Air, she continued to design interiors for many years, but she withdrew from all mass-produced furnishings design except textiles. In a short epilogue, I summarize this final period of her career, from the late 1950s through the 1970s. I speculate why, after so much success designing various mass-produced furnishings, especially furniture, Pipsan focused on work associated with women. By following Pipsan's trajectory and the personal-work relationships interwoven in it, my thesis provides a benchmark for the study of other women

designers who collaborated with men and whose careers followed a similar path, from interior decorating to mass-produced furnishings.

**PART I: From Childhood to Interior Design**

## Chapter 1: Design Training, Early Work, and Personal-Work Relationships

Growing up in Finland, Pipsan undertook design training and executed her earliest known design work. The activities she engaged in and the style in which she worked demonstrated her interests as well as the influence of her mother and father. When Pipsan was eighteen, her family came to the United States, after which she made interior furnishings for their new home and worked on her father's interior designs. Pipsan married Bob, an architect, and the two began partnering on design projects, and Bob and Eliel began working together on mass-produced furnishing designs. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Pipsan also independently designed custom textile furnishings and pursued various routes to work for pay as a designer. The training and experience Pipsan gained in this early period, from childhood into her early thirties, helped prepare her to enter the field of interior decorating and, later on, mass-produced furnishings design.

### Pipsan's parents

On March 31, 1905, Eva-Lisa "Pipsan" Saarinen was born to Gottlieb Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) and Louise "Loja" Saarinen (née Gesellius, 1879-1968) in Kirkkonummi, just outside Helsinki. Eliel was an accomplished architect, having formed an architecture office in 1896 with two classmates, Herman Gesellius and Armas Lindgren.<sup>1</sup> The most important early building designed by the office was the Finnish Pavilion for the 1900 Paris *Exposition Universelle*, lauded by contemporaries in Finland and abroad for its inventive style that combined influences ranging from medieval Finnish churches, contemporary Finnish vernacular design, *Jugend* (as Art Nouveau was called in Finland), work by the American architect H. H. Richardson, to the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>2</sup> After the

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<sup>1</sup> Marika Hausen, "The Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," in *Eliel Saarinen: Projects, 1896-1923*, ed. Marika Hausen, et. al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 11; John Boulton Smith, *The Golden Age of Finnish Art: Art Nouveau and the National Spirit* (Helsinki: Otava, 1985), 127-33; Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel

Paris Exposition, Eliel and his partners completed another significant project, Hvitträsk (constructed 1902-1903), a compound in Kirkkonummi for the three architects to work in and live in with their families.<sup>3</sup> As of 1907, Eliel worked independently. For the residential and public architecture he designed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he treated a building, its surroundings, and its interiors as a wholly designed, unified environment. From early on, he often designed the interiors for his architecture as well as furnishings, including textiles, furniture, and lamps.<sup>4</sup>

Pipsan's mother Loja had been born into a well-off family and, after expressing an interest in art at a young age, she studied drawing and sculpture in Helsinki from 1898 to 1902 and sculpture in Paris from 1902 to 1903.<sup>5</sup> For a number of decades, studying art had been considered acceptable for middle- and upper-class women in Finland. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, women made up over half of the student body in certain art schools. Studying art was considered a cultural accomplishment that demonstrated a middle- and upper-class woman's refinement; women who studied art, it was widely assumed, would go on to become wives and mothers rather than professional artists or work for pay outside the home.<sup>6</sup> When Loja returned to Finland from Paris in 1903, she went to live with her older brother Herman Gesellius, Eliel's architecture partner at the time, at Hvitträsk.<sup>7</sup> There she sculpted as well as painted, took photographs, and designed

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Saarinen," 33; Marianne Aav, "Finland," in *International Arts and Crafts*, eds. Karen Livingstone and Linda Perry (London: V&A Publications, 2005): 266-75.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark, "Scandinavia: 'Beauty for All,'" in *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Europe & America: Design for the Modern World*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames & Hudson in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2004), 212-13; Aav, "Finland," 274-75.

<sup>4</sup> See Anna-Lisa Amberg, *Saarinen's Interior Design: 1896-1923* (Helsinki: Taideteollisuusmuseo, 1984); Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 41-42; Anna-Lisa Amberg, "Catalogue of Works—Interiors, Applied and Fine Arts, and Paintings," in *Eliel Saarinen Projects*, 222-45; and Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 8-9, 13.

<sup>5</sup> "Biographies of the Artists," in *Design in America*, 274; Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Maritta Pohls, "Women's Work in Finland 1870-1940," in *The Lady with the Bow: The Story of Finnish Women*, eds. Merja Manninen and Päivi Setälä (Helsinki: Otava Publications, 1990), 68-69; Riitta Nikula, "Women in the History of Finnish Art," in *The Lady with the Bow*, 82-84.

<sup>7</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 15.

furnishings.<sup>8</sup> Loja and Eliel fell in love and married on March 6, 1904.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with contemporary notions of a wife's proper role, Loja took care of the children (with the help of a nanny), managed the house at Hvitträsk (with the help of a housekeeper), and encouraged her husband in his career.<sup>10</sup> After giving birth to Pipsan in 1905, Loja did not sculpt for two years because of her obligations as mother and wife. When she returned to her creative work, she applied her skills to assist her husband by sculpting models of the buildings he designed.<sup>11</sup>

### Design training and early work in Finland

Pipsan lived the first eighteen years of her life at Hvitträsk, where she was exposed to exceptional creativity. Some of the greatest Finnish artists of the day, including painter Akseli Gallén-Kallela, sculptor Geza Maroti, and musicians Jean Sibelius and Gustav Mahler, were among the Saarinens many visitors.<sup>12</sup> Eliel and Loja welcomed Pipsan and her younger brother Eero (born when Pipsan was five, in 1910) among their company and their work.<sup>13</sup> Pipsan later fondly recalled how the environment at Hvitträsk provided much of her early design education: "I had a lot of training at home and in Dad's studio. All our friends were artistic—designers, painters, sculptors, musicians."<sup>14</sup>

Little is known about the training Pipsan referred to. Eliel and Loja encouraged their children to draw, paint, and model as young children.<sup>15</sup> These and other activities Pipsan engaged in mimicked the activities of her parents. When she was a little girl, she "played at designing" in Eliel's

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<sup>8</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 15; Eleanor Breitmeyer, "Art of the Past Ever Present to a Gracious Lady," *Detroit News*, 31 Jan. 1965; Anna-Lisa Amberg, "Catalogue of the Interiors in Eliel Saarinen's Home," in *Hvitträsk: The Home as a Work of Art*, ed. Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1987), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 344 n74-75.

<sup>10</sup> Marika Hausen, "Hvitträsk: The Home as a Work of Art," in *Hvitträsk*, 44, 51; Anna-Lisa Amberg, "Catalogue of the Interiors in Eliel Saarinen's Home," in *Hvitträsk*, 107 n77, 109 n117.

<sup>11</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 18-21; Breitmeyer, "Art of the Past Ever Present."

<sup>13</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 19-21; Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 53.

<sup>14</sup> Pipsan quoted in Lilian Jackson Braun, "The Nation's Architects Honor Mrs. Swanson," *Detroit Free Press*, 19 April 1971; See also Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>15</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 19-21; Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 53.

studio, working on her own drawings at a drafting table adjacent to Eliel's (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup> Pipsan's earliest known creative work, drawings dated to ages six and seven, include depictions of jewellery and cutlery (figs. 2-3). Her designs are evenly spaced and drawn from a bird's eye view, similar to technical design drawings. Pipsan also signed several childhood drawings with a stylized, rectilinear monogram.<sup>17</sup> Eliel was a highly skilled draughtsman, and he designed buildings and furnishings by drawing.<sup>18</sup> Later in life, after Pipsan had established a reputation as a designer, she recollected the importance drawing had in her creative development: "I cut my teeth on a drawing pencil in my father's studio. I just can't remember a time when I couldn't draw."<sup>19</sup> A journalist who interviewed Pipsan recounted how "at an age when most young girls were playing with their dolls, Pipsan crawled beneath her illustrious father's drawing table and made a secret pledge that someday she, too, would make a contribution to real art on her own."<sup>20</sup>

Loja also influenced Pipsan's creative development, teaching her batik dyeing by the 1910s.<sup>21</sup> At the time, batik textiles and garments were favoured in bohemian circles, after attracting the interest of Western designers in 1900 when a display of Javanese batiks were exhibited at the Paris Exposition.<sup>22</sup> At Hvitträsk, in a small room and balcony located off Eliel's studio, Pipsan and Loja dyed batik textiles together.<sup>23</sup> Mother and daughter exhibited their work jointly at Salon Strindberg, a prominent Helsinki art gallery, probably in the early 1920s.<sup>24</sup> Pipsan's few known batik textiles

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<sup>16</sup> Grace Miller, "Husband and Wife Cooperate, Designing Modern Houses and Furnishings," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 Aug. 1948.

<sup>17</sup> "Pipsan at Hvitträsk," box 13, scrapbook 3, Saarinen Family Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (hereafter cited as SFP).

<sup>18</sup> Amberg, *Saarinen's Interior Design*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Pipsan quoted in Beatrice Putnam, "Drawing Board to Forge," *Detroit News*, 2 July 1950.

<sup>20</sup> Hazel Trumble, "Pipsan Saarinen Swanson is Designer with Purpose," *Pontiac Daily Press*, 3 Nov. 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Hausen, "Hvitträsk" 44.

<sup>22</sup> Nicola J. Shilliam, "From Bohemian to Bourgeois: American Batik in the Early Twentieth Century" (Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, 1994), paper 1052, 253.

<sup>23</sup> Hausen, "Hvitträsk," 59.

<sup>24</sup> Gustaf Strengell, "Battik-arbeten av Loja och Eva-Lisa Saarinen," undated Swedish-language newspaper article, photocopy in Cranbrook Archives. Thank you to Leena Svinhufvud for informing me of article's author and confirming the article's contents.

suggest an influence of her mother's style through compositions with a series of roundels, each featuring a different animal or figure, surrounded by foliate motifs (figs. 4-7). Eliel's influence is also evident in Pipsan's designs: he used similar dense scrolling motifs with dots in two-dimensional architectural decorations, such as the Lahti Town Hall and Hvitträsk (figs. 8-9).

Pipsan was also interested in two-dimensional repeat pattern design, as evidenced by a series of watercolour sketches that date stylistically to the 1910s or early 1920s (figs. 10-21). Because Pipsan was engaged in other textile crafts, these patterns may have been conceived of as dress or furnishing textiles, or they may have been intended as wallpaper designs. The style of the patterns was clearly influenced by Wiener Werkstätte patterns, which Loja had dressed Pipsan and her brother in around 1916 (figs. 22-23). Pipsan's designs resembled Wiener Werkstätte patterns in the stripe overlaid with bold flowers; the black grid comprising small squares with foliate motifs in the spaces; the leaves flattened and stylized into banded almond shapes; the clusters of dots; the spiral lines; and the flowers simplified into an amoeboid circle with simple stem and two almond-shaped leaves (figs. 23-27). Pipsan's designs also evoked the patterns designed by Atelier Martine, the textile and interior furnishings workshop established by French couturier Paul Poiret in 1911. The Wiener Werkstätte had inspired Poiret to establish Martine, and the textiles designed there were popular among avant-garde circles in the 1910s.<sup>25</sup> Atelier Martine designed patterns with amoeboid flowers and clusters of dots, as well as large naive flowers rendered from a bird's eye view (figs. 28-30). Pipsan's pattern designs exhibited Eliel's influence as well, especially in one pattern with a scrolling spiral motif with dots similar to a two-dimensional pattern he favoured in his architectural work, described above (figs. 8-9, 21).

The exposure to art, craft, and design that Eliel and Loja provided for Pipsan at home was

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<sup>25</sup> Palmer White, *Poiret* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1973), 117-29. Atelier Martine designed dress textiles as well as furnishing textiles.



supplemented with formal education in Helsinki. From 1921 to 1923 (ages sixteen to eighteen), she took classes at the Atheneum Art School and the University of Helsinki in weaving, fabric design, and ceramics as well as metalworking with Paavo Tynnel, who later achieved renown for his lamp designs.<sup>26</sup> Concerning Pipsan's work in ceramics, it is only known that she took at least one class in the subject.

Pipsan's primary interest in the early 1920s, alongside her textiles work, appears to have been small metalworks made using chasing and repoussé raising techniques.<sup>27</sup> In this area, Pipsan had some female role models. Especially influential may have been the women associated with the Glasgow School of Art in the late nineteenth century, many of whom made raised metalworks in what became known as the Glasgow Style. Among them, De Courcy Lewthwaite Dewar achieved renown for her raised and enamelled metalware; Jessie King designed jewellery for Liberty & Co., and she also worked in ceramics, dyed batiks, and designed interiors; and sisters Frances McDonald and Margaret McDonald Mackintosh practiced small-scale metalworking as well as textile design, among other pursuits. All four women were recognized in artistic circles for their work in metals, and other areas Pipsan engaged in, by winning exhibition and competition prizes and receiving coverage in leading art and design publications.<sup>28</sup> Pipsan may have learned about these women and their accomplishments through her father: when she was young, Eliel was so interested in the Glasgow Style that he designed sections of the upstairs of Hvitträsk—around 1908—with strong influences of the Scottish cohort, especially the work of Margaret and her architect-designer

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<sup>26</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; Pipsan, "Look Homeward, America" project statement, 1955, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>27</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 21 July [1925], box 8, folder 3, SP; Loja to Johannes Öhqvist, Hvitträsk groundskeeper, 12 March 1926, National Library of Finland, Johannes Öhqvist Collection, 269.66 (hereafter cited as CJO). Thank you to Leena Svinhufvud for sharing her notes on this and other Swedish-language letters exchanged between Loja and the Hvitträsk groundskeeper, and for translating relevant passages into English; Ernest A. Baumgarth, "Who's News Today: Eliel Saarinen: Architect De Luxe," *Detroit News*, 19 Aug. 1943.

<sup>28</sup> See *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design, 1880-1920*, ed. Jude Burkhauser (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990).

husband Charles Rennie Mackintosh.<sup>29</sup> Notably, Pipsan's childhood drawings that mimicked professional design drawings were mainly of small metalware (jewellery and cutlery) rather than furniture, buildings, or other object types generally considered to be the work of men that she would have witnessed her father design. In Pipsan's drawings and the style of her early design work, she sometimes imitated Eliel, but only to the extent that she remained in the realm of pursuits associated with women makers.

### Immigration to the United States and marriage

In February 1923, just before Pipsan's eighteenth birthday, Eliel began what was intended to be a visit to the United States, but by April, Pipsan, Loja, and Eero joined him.<sup>30</sup> From autumn 1923, Eliel was Visiting Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Two of his students would impact his and Pipsan's future: Bob and Henry Scripps Booth.<sup>31</sup> Bob, a Swedish-American who spoke Swedish, served as Eliel's unofficial translator at the university.<sup>32</sup> Booth was the son of George Gough Booth, president of the *Detroit News* and owner of a 174-acre plot of partially developed land outside Detroit (in what is today the city of Bloomfield Hills). Booth wanted to develop his estate, which he called Cranbrook, into a place for artists and craftspeople to live and work.<sup>33</sup> As an advocate of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he had much in common with Eliel; the men shared a commitment to all areas of art, craft, and design, especially beautiful and high-quality everyday objects and totally designed built environments. Convinced that Eliel could help him realize his dream for Cranbrook, Booth invited him to work on architecture

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<sup>29</sup> Hausen, "Hvitträsk," 51; Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Bob, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 7 Feb. 1980, box 4, tape 203, Collection of Oral History Interviews, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (hereafter cited as COHI).

<sup>32</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>33</sup> Davira S. Taragin, "The History of the Cranbrook Community," in *Design in America*, 35-41.

there and help develop an art and design academy he planned to establish. Eliel accepted the invitation, derailing his plans to return permanently to Finland with his family. In 1925, the Saarinens moved to Cranbrook so Eliel could begin work.<sup>34</sup> Pipsan lived in the Detroit suburb for the rest of her life.

During Pipsan's first few years in the United States, she continued to practice batik dyeing, chasing and repoussé in silver and copper, and she designed and made her own fashionable garments.<sup>35</sup> Pipsan likely learned some of her dressmaking skills from her mother, who wore garments she designed and made herself; Loja had a reputation—in Finland and the United States—for dressing distinctively.<sup>36</sup> In 1923 and 1924, Pipsan and Loja exhibited their batik work together twice, including at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts.<sup>37</sup> Pipsan would have found a warm welcome for her handcrafts in the environment that Booth was working to develop in the Detroit area. Booth too was an admirer of the Wiener Werkstätte.<sup>38</sup> By the late 1920s, he had established a metalworking shop at Cranbrook, and Pipsan probably had access to the facilities.<sup>39</sup>

Not long after the Saarinens arrived in Michigan, Pipsan met her future husband and lifelong collaborator. Bob had formed a relationship with Eliel when he was his student, and he claimed to have convinced Booth to employ Eliel to work on Cranbrook.<sup>40</sup> Because Booth also enlisted Bob to help develop Cranbrook architecture, Bob moved to Cranbrook too, into a home neighbouring the

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<sup>34</sup> Taragin, 38; "Chronology," in *Design in America*, 278.

<sup>35</sup> Loja to Öhqvist, 12 March 1926; Bob to Pipsan, 21 July [1925].

<sup>36</sup> Hausen, "Hvitträsk," 44; Chunggi Choo, student at Cranbrook Academy of Art in the early 1960s, interview by Jane Milosch, Chief Curator, Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 30-31 July 2007, 26 July 2008, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as AAASI).

<sup>37</sup> "Everybody Works in this Family," *Detroit Free Press*, 16 Dec. 1923; Newspaper clipping, 8 Nov. 1924, unknown Ann Arbor newspaper, Loja's scrapbook no. 1, 42, Eliel Saarinen Collection, Museum of Finnish Architecture (hereafter cited as ESC); "Four Exhibits at Arts, Crafts," *Detroit Free Press*, 10 Feb. 1924.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Judson Clark, "Cranbrook and the Search for Twentieth-Century Form," in *Design in America*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> J. David Farmer, "Metalwork and Bookbinding," in *Design in America*, 150-52.

<sup>40</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 63; Bob, interview by Gerard; Pipsan to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel's biographer, 11 April 1972, box 1, folder 6, SAR; Bob to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel's biographer, 25 April 1972, Albert Christ-Janer Papers, box 8, Correspondence—Saarinen family, AAASI, photocopies in the Cranbrook Archives (hereafter cited as CJP).

Saarinens' temporary living quarters in an old farmhouse building on the property.<sup>41</sup> Within a few months of living and working in these intimate conditions, Bob became so close to the Saarinens that he felt as if he were part of the family.<sup>42</sup> His and Pipsan's rooms shared a wall, and the two grew particularly close.<sup>43</sup> Initially, the relationship appears to have been platonic, and Bob proposed marriage to someone else.<sup>44</sup> In less than one year, however, Bob broke off his engagement, and developed an openly romantic relationship with Pipsan. Shortly after she turned twenty-one, on May 8, 1926, the couple eloped to Toledo, Ohio—just over an hour south of Bloomfield Hills.

The young couple eloped because Eliel and/or Loja objected to the match, probably in part because Bob was of a lower socio-economic status than the Saarinens.<sup>45</sup> According to Henry Scripps Booth, a close friend of Bob and Pipsan, Loja felt Bob was using Pipsan to get close to Eliel.<sup>46</sup> Bob was, after all, an upstart architect who believed himself to be Eliel's most dedicated student.<sup>47</sup> At the beginning of their marriage, Bob struggled to support Pipsan, and she had to seek financial assistance from Eliel.<sup>48</sup> According to 1920s notions of propriety, Bob's marriage to Pipsan without her parents' consent, shortly after breaking an engagement with another woman, would have been considered not only untraditional but dishonourable. As such, it created a local scandal in the Cranbrook community. George Gough Booth, a devout Christian whom the Saarinens relied upon

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<sup>41</sup> "Chronology," 278; Gregory Wittkopp, *Saarinen House and Garden: A Total Work of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 26.

<sup>42</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 21 July [1925].

<sup>43</sup> Henry Scripps Booth, "History of Cranbrook," box 8, folder 10, SP.

<sup>44</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 21 July [1925].

<sup>45</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 21 July [1925]; Margueritte Kimball, financial secretary of Cranbrook Academy of Art from 1942 to 1968, interview by Robert F. Brown, Director, Boston office of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1 March-13 April 1993, AAASI; In Michigan, a couple had to wait five days after application to receive their marriage license, whereas in Ohio it could all be done in the same day. *Public Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan Passed at the Regular Session of 1925*, (Lansing: Bob Smith, 192), 146; Archibold H. Throckmorton, ed., *The General Code of the State of Ohio*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Baldwin Law Publishing, 1926), 2628. Thank you to Gerald Kowalski, Esq. and Judge Norm Zimmelman for your help researching and interpreting the laws.

<sup>46</sup> Booth, "History of Cranbrook"; Bob Jr., Ronald Swanson, and Jan Swanson, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 9 March 2005, box 5, tape 328, COHI.

<sup>47</sup> Bob to Christ-Janer, 25 April 1972.

<sup>48</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 5 June [1926], box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob to Pipsan, undated [late June 1926], box 8, folder 3, SP.

for their livelihood, strongly disapproved of the elopement and was especially angry at Bob for his comportment. Bob admitted to Pipsan that Booth was so upset about their elopement that Eliel's plans to develop Cranbrook Academy of Art were in jeopardy.<sup>49</sup> Following the marriage, Pipsan's relations with her parents were strained and uncomfortable.<sup>50</sup> By the late 1920s, however, Eliel and Loja accepted the marriage enough that they were able to live with the Swansons for several years while the Saarinens' own permanent residence was built at Cranbrook.<sup>51</sup>

At the beginning of her marriage, Pipsan does not appear to have had definite career goals. On her marriage license, her occupation was listed as "none" and she was noted as having no occupation in the 1930 United States Census.<sup>52</sup> In 1926, when Bob was designing a house for them, Pipsan expressed ambivalence about having her own studio in it, telling him not to build her one if he was not going to use it too.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Pipsan did not express a desire for her own space where she could practice metalworking, batik dyeing, and dressmaking, all activities that either required a fair amount of space or a special setup.<sup>54</sup> At Hvitträsk, Loja did not have her own designated studio space, but rather practiced batik dyeing in a closet-sized room and balcony next to Eliel's expansive architecture studio, and she may have woven textiles in a small, poorly-lit basement room.<sup>55</sup> Loja had set the example for Pipsan that a married woman put her husband's ambitions and work before her own creative pursuits. Perhaps this was why Pipsan wanted to make sure Bob needed the studio too.

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<sup>49</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 5 June [1926].

<sup>50</sup> Pipsan to Bob, 11 June 1926, box 8, folder 3, SP; Booth, "History of Cranbrook."

<sup>51</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>52</sup> Bob and Pipsan's application for marriage license, box 8, folder 10, SP.

<sup>53</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 3 June 1926, box 8, folder 3, SP; Pipsan to Bob, 11 June 1926.

<sup>54</sup> Jeannine Falino ("Women Metalsmiths," 223) claims that metalworking can be done easily in the home. In fact, very little metalworking can be done without a torch, which necessitates an inflammable space and ventilation. The type of metalwork Pipsan did, chasing and repoussé, requires the work to be regularly annealed to keep the metal malleable. The two known garments Pipsan made in the 1920s were made of silk crepe, a delicate, drapery fabric that is difficult to cut out accurately without a rectangular surface at least 45" by 60". Batik work also requires that the textile (usually 45" wide) be laid out flat without pulling so the wax can be painted on. Dress made by Pipsan, CAM 1989.44, Cranbrook Art Museum; Photograph of Pipsan wearing a dress made of batik textiles, 1924, possession of Karen Swanson.

<sup>55</sup> Hausen, "Hvitträsk," 59.

### Early work in interiors and furnishings

In 1926, before her marriage, Pipsan and Loja designed and made furnishings for their temporary home in the old farmhouse building at Cranbrook. These included batik-dyed pillows and lampshades as well as embroidered curtains.<sup>56</sup> Besides the previously discussed Wiener-Werkstätte-inspired patterns, which may have been conceived of as furnishing textiles or wallpaper, this is the first known time that Pipsan designed home furnishings.

Starting in the late 1920s, she contributed, along with her mother and brother, to the interiors of a number of projects headed by Eliel, including several buildings on the Cranbrook campus. For the Cranbrook School for boys academic building (constructed 1926-ca. 1927), Pipsan designed two-dimensional ceiling patterns in the entryway (fig. 31).<sup>57</sup> The Cranbrook building she contributed the most to was the girls' school, Kingswood School Cranbrook (constructed 1930-1931).<sup>58</sup> Pipsan described her role in Kingswood in vague terms, writing that she “collaborated on [the] interior,” worked “on models and special designs,” and “had a part...in the decorations.”<sup>59</sup> She also indicated that she designed the auditorium stage curtain (fig. 32).<sup>60</sup> *Architectural Forum's* report on the project was more specific: “the small amount of painted decoration was designed and executed under the direction of Pipsan Saarinen Swanson.”<sup>61</sup> The painted surface decorations included two-dimensional patterns and motifs on the walls and ceiling in the auditorium and ballroom as well as stencil designs on the shutters in the dining room (figs. 32-34).<sup>62</sup> Concerning Pipsan's work on Eliel's

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<sup>56</sup> Loja to Öhqvist, 12 March 1926.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, “Interior Design and Furniture,” 93.

<sup>58</sup> Pipsan CV, undated [ca. 1948].

<sup>59</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1946], box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan CV, undated [ca. 1948]; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>60</sup> Label on photograph of Kingswood School Cranbrook, [undated], box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>61</sup> “The Kingswood School for Girls,” *Architectural Forum* 56, no. 1 (Jan. 1932): 39.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory Wittkopp (*Saarinen House*, 42-43) believes that Pipsan also worked on Eliel, Loja, and Eero's home at Cranbrook (constructed 1929-1930) by designing stencil decorations for the upstairs doors because Pipsan is thought to have designed the stencil door decorations in Kingswood School Cranbrook around the same time. Wittkopp also

architectural projects, it is only known that she was paid \$100 in March 1928 for her work on Cranbrook School for boys.<sup>63</sup> This is the earliest known time that Pipsan was paid for her design work.

Pipsan also contributed work to model rooms that Eliel designed for two exhibitions at the MMA. For *The Architect and the Industrial Arts* in 1929, the museum invited well-known architects to design model rooms (fig. 35).<sup>64</sup> Eliel designed a dining room, for which Pipsan designed the textile wall covering.<sup>65</sup> For Eliel's "Room for a Lady," a model dressing room designed for the 1934 MMA exhibition *Contemporary American Industrial Art*, Pipsan designed and made a gown, displayed on a mannequin.<sup>66</sup>

The following year, the model room with mannequin was exhibited at Cranbrook in the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*. In this exhibition, at a smaller venue where the Saarinens held greater clout than at the MMA, Pipsan and Bob also displayed their work in their own rights by designing a model living room together, replete with custom furnishings. The labour was divided between Pipsan and Bob along gendered lines: Pipsan designed the curtain textiles, whereas Bob designing custom furniture (fig. 36).<sup>67</sup>

Pipsan exhibited other designs for textile furnishings in the late 1930s. In 1937, she exhibited a rug design in the MMA exhibition *Rugs and Carpets*.<sup>68</sup> Pipsan may have secured this opportunity

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believes that because Pipsan designed a residence ten years later (the Koebel residence) with stencil door decorations, she must have designed the ones in the Saarinen residence. As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, the Koebels initially hired Eliel to design their home because they admired his home at Cranbrook. The stencil door decorations in the Koebel residence can therefore also be interpreted as Pipsan designing the interiors according to the clients' taste—i.e., similar to Eliel's home.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, "Interior Design and Furniture," 302n6.

<sup>64</sup> J. Stewart Johnson, *American Modern, 1925-1940: Design for a New Age* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the American Federation of Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 30.

<sup>65</sup> *The Architect and the Industrial Arts* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1929), 61.

<sup>66</sup> *Contemporary American Industrial Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1934), 22.

<sup>67</sup> "Home Furnishing Exhibit Awaited," *Birmingham Eccentric* (MI), 9 May 1935; Notation on verso of photograph depicting a bar buffet, coffee table, and curtain displayed at the 1935 Cranbrook *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, box 12, folder 6, SP.

<sup>68</sup> *Rugs and Carpets: An International Exhibition of Contemporary Industrial Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1937), 12.

through her father since he had twice been invited to exhibit at the MMA, or perhaps she secured the opportunity through her mother, who had established a weaving studio at Cranbrook in 1928 called Studio Loja Saarinen. The studio was initially formed to fabricate textiles for Cranbrook buildings but had since become known for producing high-quality, hand-woven textiles, including rugs, patronized by the likes of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>69</sup> Pipsan's rug design shown at the MMA was woven at Studio Loja Saarinen, as were the curtains Pipsan designed and exhibited at Cranbrook in 1935, discussed above.<sup>70</sup> Given Loja's reputation, perhaps the museum invited her to participate in the rug exhibition and she chose to share the opportunity with her daughter. The following year Pipsan secured another opportunity through her parents to exhibit her design work. A 1938 exhibition of Saarinen family work at the Toledo Museum of Art included a rug and tablecloth designed by Pipsan.<sup>71</sup>

Pipsan's exhibited work and her contributions to her father's interiors displayed an influence of Eliel's style. The surface patterns Pipsan designed for Kingswood and Cranbrook School resembled Eliel's earlier architectural work. The ceiling dome pattern for the Kingswood ballroom evoked Eliel's vaulted ceiling pattern in the Lahti Town Hall (figs. 8, 34). The pattern she designed for the ribbed ceiling of Cranbrook School was similar to the rib ornaments Eliel often used in his architecture in Finland (figs. 31, 37-39).

After Bob married Pipsan, he became on closer terms with Eliel by collaborating with him on mass-produced furnishings. The first such project may have been inspired by the tableware Eliel designed for the 1929 MMA exhibition. Although Bob did not design anything for the exhibition, he felt "involved" in it since he sat in on meetings with Eliel and MMA curators.<sup>72</sup> The tableware

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<sup>69</sup> Thurman, "Textiles," 175-92.

<sup>70</sup> *Rugs and Carpets*, 12; "Home Furnishing Exhibit Awaited."

<sup>71</sup> *Contemporary Decorative Art* (Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art, 1938), n.p.

<sup>72</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.



exhibited were made by various well-known manufacturers, including the International Silver Company, who subsequently mass-produced Eliel's designs.<sup>73</sup> From 1929 until 1937, Eliel served as a designer and consultant for International Silver, and the company featured Eliel's name in advertisements.<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of the collaboration, Bob performed managerial duties by traveling to the company headquarters in Connecticut to settle a contract and visit a factory. Thereafter, he served as a liaison between International Silver and Eliel for eight years.<sup>75</sup> In general, Bob viewed his contribution to Saarinen projects from around this time as that of "manager" or "agent."<sup>76</sup> Pipsan does not appear to have been involved in the International Silver work beyond possibly urging her father to complete sketches at Bob's insistence.<sup>77</sup> The Swansons benefitted financially from the collaboration throughout the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> According to Bob, at his suggestion, Eliel patented a short-blade knife—similar to one shown at the MMA—to be produced by International Silver.<sup>79</sup> Money earned from the patent rights provided income for the Swansons during the difficult Depression years.<sup>80</sup> The arrangement was probably more of a boon for the Swansons than Eliel, because Eliel had his rather generous Cranbrook salary to rely on.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Contemporary American Industrial Art*, 61; Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 108.

<sup>74</sup> Bob's curriculum vitae, ca. 1968, box 8, folder 6, SP; International Silver advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, Oct. 1930, 136; International Silver advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, Nov. 1930, 216; International Silver advertisement, *Harper's Bazaar*, Oct. 1929, 171.

<sup>75</sup> Bob to Pipsan, undated [1929], undated [1932], 7 July 1938, 1 Aug. 1938, 10 Aug. 1938, 17 Aug. 1938, box 8, folder 3, SP.

<sup>76</sup> Bob to Christ-Janer, 25 April 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Bob to Pipsan, undated [1932].

<sup>78</sup> Bob to Pipsan, undated [1932], 17 Aug. 1938.

<sup>79</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Design patents 84,654 and 84,655 issued 14 July 1931. United States Patent and Trademark Office online database, <https://patft.uspto.gov/netahtml/PTO/srchnum.htm>; *Index of Patents Issued from the United States Patent Office: 1931* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 700.

<sup>80</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>81</sup> In 1927, Eliel's salary was \$12,000 a year. In 1929, only 8.2% of American families had an annual income greater than \$5,000. Wittkopp, *Saarinen House*, 25; Winifred D. Wandersee, "The Economics of Middle-Income Family Life: Working Women During the Great Depression," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*, eds. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983): 48.

### Forays into paid work

In the late 1920s, Pipsan pursued work for pay through a number of outlets, possibly out of financial need since Bob was not wealthy and struggled to support them at the outset of their marriage.

Pipsan's connections through her father and Cranbrook led to opportunities for her to work off and on campus. For example, Albert Kahn, a renowned Detroit architect who admired Eliel, helped Pipsan secure one coveted job.<sup>82</sup> In 1929, Kahn recommended her to the president of Packard Motor Car Company, Alvan Macauley, who was looking for designers to work on "designing and decorating the interior of motor cars."<sup>83</sup> Pipsan designed for Packard for about a year.<sup>84</sup> The only known example of her work on automobile interiors is a steering wheel design, which demonstrated an influence of her father's style in its telescoping forms similar to those that appear throughout the design of Kingswood School Cranbrook (figs. 40-41). Pipsan patented the steering wheel design, likely at the insistence of Bob since he had suggested patenting her father's designs around the same time, and he later patented his own designs as well.<sup>85</sup> At some point, Bob became involved in Pipsan's Packard work, the extent of which is undocumented. It is known that he met and corresponded with Macauley while Pipsan was at Hvitträsk for the summer of 1930, requesting that he and Pipsan be involved with more than just the interiors of the cars. This, however, was not how the automobile industry functioned. Unwilling to have interior designers move outside their prescribed realm, Macauley denied Bob's request, possibly causing Pipsan's work for Packard to come to an end.<sup>86</sup>

The following year, Pipsan secured another independent job. In 1931, Truscon Laboratories

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<sup>82</sup> Wittkopp, *Saarinens House*, 24; Taragin, "The History of the Cranbrook Community," 38.

<sup>83</sup> Alvin Macauley to Pipsan, 18 March 1929, box 9, folder 10, SAR.

<sup>84</sup> Packard invoices, Oct. 1929 to July 1930, box 9, folder 10, SAR; Pipsan's CV from ca. 1948 states she designed for Packard only in 1930.

<sup>85</sup> Design patent 82,190, issued 30 Sept. 1930, photocopy in box 1, folder 3, SP; Bob patented his design for a molded plywood stacking chair in 1953 and a farm gate in 1954. Box 4, folders 6 and 8, SP.

<sup>86</sup> Bob to Pipsan, undated [1929]; Alvan Macauley to Bob, 23 June-11 July 1930, box 9, folder 10, SAR.

hired her as colour consultant for public schools in Hamtramck, a city located within Detroit. Little is known of what the job entailed, beyond Pipsan writing a pamphlet called “A New Note in School Painting” in which she expounded on the importance of “friendly and home-like” colours in educational settings.<sup>87</sup> Hamtramck public schools appear to have been painted—using paint made by Truscon Laboratories—according to Pipsan’s suggestions. Colour selection was considered a suitable activity for women, who, according to essentialist notions and psychological theories, were thought to be more emotional and sensitive than men. Because the burgeoning field of colour psychology maintained that certain colours triggered certain emotions, women were thought to make the best colour designers.<sup>88</sup> School design was also an area in which women designers gained early footing. In Finland, for example, some of the earliest female architects designed school buildings.<sup>89</sup> This too was an area that was related to widely held ideas about women’s inherent abilities. Teaching had long been an occupation considered suited to women’s supposedly natural motherly abilities to instruct, nurture, and raise children.

It is not known how Pipsan got the job designing colour for schools, although it may have again been thanks to Albert Kahn. Truscon Laboratories was the Hamtramck-based business of Albert Kahn’s brother Julius Kahn.<sup>90</sup> Years earlier, Julius Kahn had invented the system for reinforcing concrete that Albert Kahn used in his famous factory buildings. Starting in 1904, Julius Kahn patented and distributed what came to be known as the Kahn Bar system through his company Truscon, shorthand for Trussed Concrete Steel Corporation. By the 1920s, Truscon produced a number of paint products that waterproofed cement, iron, and steel.<sup>91</sup> Such paint

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<sup>87</sup> Pipsan, “A New Note in School Painting,” 1931, box 9, folder 15, SP; Pipsan CV, ca. 1948.

<sup>88</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press in association with the Lemelson Center, Smithsonian Institution, 2012), 139–41.

<sup>89</sup> Nikula, “Women in the History of Finnish Art,” 89.

<sup>90</sup> *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* 406 (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1931): 21.

<sup>91</sup> *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* 406: 21; Truscon Asepticote Washable Wall Coating advertisement, *Michiganensian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1928), 559.

products must have been the ones used in Pipsan's job for Hamtramck schools. The relationship with Truscon laboratories, like the Packard relationship, appears to have been short-lived, perhaps lasting less than a year.

The stock market crashed the same year Pipsan embarked into paid design work, although many Americans, including the Swansons, did not feel the Depression's impact until around 1931.<sup>92</sup> Shortly thereafter, probably because of the Swansons' strained finances, George Gough Booth attempted to find a place for Pipsan at Cranbrook in her own right, beyond her contributions to her father's projects.<sup>93</sup> In 1932, the year Cranbrook Academy of Art was formally established, Pipsan set up a batik studio on campus and was the Resident Artist and Craftsman in Costume Design.<sup>94</sup> The next year, because of the impact of the Depression, all of the crafts studios at Cranbrook were closed except for Studio Loja Saarinen. Booth decided that the Academy would focus its instruction on design rather than craftsmanship.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps because of this shift in focus, in 1933 to 1934 Pipsan's studio at Cranbrook appears to have been repurposed (or at least renamed) from a batik studio to an interior and dress design studio.<sup>96</sup> It is not known that Pipsan was paid for maintaining a studio and serving as a Resident Artist and Craftsman; the Cranbrook Foundation appears to have only provided her with the studio space, paid the initial cost of \$600 to equip her studio, and covered the cost of utilities. The Foundation left it up to Pipsan to decide whether she would take on students.<sup>97</sup> She attempted to do so between 1932 to 1936, when Cranbrook advertised various

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<sup>92</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

<sup>93</sup> Loja to Johannes Öhqvist, Hvitträsk groundskeeper, 24 Jan. 1932, CJO.

<sup>94</sup> "Meeting of Program Committee: Cranbrook Art Council," 4 Oct. 1932, box 18, folder 5, Cranbrook Foundation RG I: Office Records (hereafter cited as CFRG); Oct. 1932 course announcement, Cranbrook Academy of Art Publications, Series V: Catalogs 1936-1948 (hereafter cited as CAAP).

<sup>95</sup> Taragin, "The History of the Cranbrook Community," 42.

<sup>96</sup> Pipsan CV, undated [ca. 1948].

<sup>97</sup> "Meeting of Program Committee: Cranbrook Art Council"; Thurman, "Textiles," 189.

courses by her in batik, costume, interior, and furnishing design.<sup>98</sup> These courses were likely targeted to attract students from the general public instead of the Academy.<sup>99</sup> According to Bob, Pipsan did not have any students in costume design, and there is no compelling evidence that she had students in batik, interior, or furnishings design either.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time Pipsan advertised classes, she designed and made custom womenswear, exhibiting dress designs alongside her mother's work at Kingswood School in 1932, and the following year, she put on a fashion show at Cranbrook.<sup>101</sup> The year after that was the year she designed a gown for Eliel's "Room for a Lady" at the MMA. Despite these efforts, Pipsan only ever made eight to ten custom garments for local women.<sup>102</sup> Her attempts to work as a custom dressmaker appear to be restricted to 1932 to 1934.

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<sup>98</sup> Announcement of Classes: 1932-1933, box 28, folder 3, CFRG; 1934-1935 course announcement, 1935-1936 course announcement, CAAP.

<sup>99</sup> In the early 1930s, before the craft studios closed, Cranbrook offered classes to the public alongside Academy instruction in attempt to bring in revenue. The weaving department was the only craft department to survive the Depression, and it primarily taught women who lived near Cranbrook well into the decade. Marianne Strengell, who came to Cranbrook in 1937 to teach weaving, described her early students as of "a very low category," comprising local "housewives," "mostly hobby girls, ladies that had nothing else to do" and did not have professional ambitions in their studies. From 1933 to 1936, applicants to Cranbrook Academy of Art were required to possess an architecture degree from a university or have worked as an architect or draughtsman. Architects, most of whom were men, would have been disinclined to seek instruction in pursuits that bore feminine and/or amateur connotations such as batik, costume design, and interior design. In 1936, the requirement changed to also allow applicants who possessed a fine arts university degree. Additional reason to believe that Pipsan's courses targeted neighborhood women is the fact that her course offerings listed fees, specific session times, and a set term, whereas the Academy students did not take formal classes with set times in the early 1930s. Taragin, "History of the Cranbrook Community," 41-42; Marianne Strengell, interview by Robert F. Brown, Director, Boston office of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 8 Jan., 18 March, and 16 Dec. 1982, AAASI; Miller, "Interior Design and Furniture," 306 n73; Marianne Strengell, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 17 Dec. 1990, box 2, tape 78, COHI; "Call for Applications: Announcement of Programs," 1933, CAAP; "Announcement, 1935-1936, 1936-1937, CAAP;

<sup>100</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>101</sup> Photographs of Cranbrook Exhibition at Kingswood School Cranbrook, 1932, Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection (hereafter cited as CADC) <https://cdm16296.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p9024coll2/id/1775/rec/7>; "Report of Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1933-1934," box 17, folder 18, CFRG.

<sup>102</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

## Conclusion

Pipsan's interest in a range of design activities began in childhood and adolescence, when she designed tableware, jewellery, and two-dimensional repeat patterns, and she made batik textiles, small metalware, and dress. Although diverse, the known activities she practiced at home and the subjects Pipsan studied in post-secondary courses were all ones that were associated, to some degree, with women.<sup>103</sup> After moving to the United States, Pipsan became increasingly active in designs for interiors. Her earliest known work designing interior furnishings, those she and Loja made for their family home, were all textile furnishings, again a design and craft area considered suitable for women. Pipsan's contributions to Eliel's interiors in the late 1920s and early 1930s were also in feminine areas in which she had previous experience: the design of textiles, dress, curtains, and two-dimensional repeat patterns and surface decorations.

The training Pipsan received working in her family home, through select courses in Helsinki, and by contributing to her father's interiors was better than any design degree she could have completed in the United States because programs devoted to furnishings and interior design were few and still in a nascent state.<sup>104</sup> Working on the interiors of Eliel's projects were particularly significant for Pipsan's career development. This work, and Eliel's reputation and connections in the design world, helped qualify her to work for pay independently of him on interiors of automobiles and schools. Because she was Eliel's daughter, and possibly because she had worked on Cranbrook interiors, Pipsan also secured a formal connection to Cranbrook in her own right, by having a studio there and attempting to teach batik, interior, furnishing, and dress design. In the mid- to late 1930s, Pipsan designed and exhibited custom textile furnishings—again, she secured these opportunities

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<sup>103</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>104</sup> On higher education in product and furnishing design, see Victor Margolin, *World History of Design: World War I to World War II* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 419-24; On higher education in interior design, see Bridget May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 63-64.

through Eliel and possibly also Loja. Some of Pipsan's early pursuits, including attempts at teaching, designing car interiors, and making custom dress, were restricted to the early 1930s. Others helped lay a foundation for her career in interior decorating and mass-produced rug, printed textile, and metalware design.

Pipsan's marriage to Bob also laid some groundwork for her to eventually move in the direction of mass-produced furnishings design. Bob had financial need as well as an entrepreneurial nature, demonstrated by his interest in patenting Eliel's designs and managing his partnership with International Silver. Aspects of the International Silver collaboration would be repeated in years to come. For *Flexible Home Arrangements*, discussed in chapter 3, Bob would again collaborate with Eliel on a mass-produced furnishings project, and the Swansons would again benefit from Eliel's renowned name. Yet on that occasion, Pipsan would play an active role in the project—that of designer.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. Pipsan (approximately age 5) and Eliel, ca. 1910, in Eliel's studio at Hvitträsk, Kirkkonummi, Finland (Kirkham, *Women Designers in the USA*, 61)



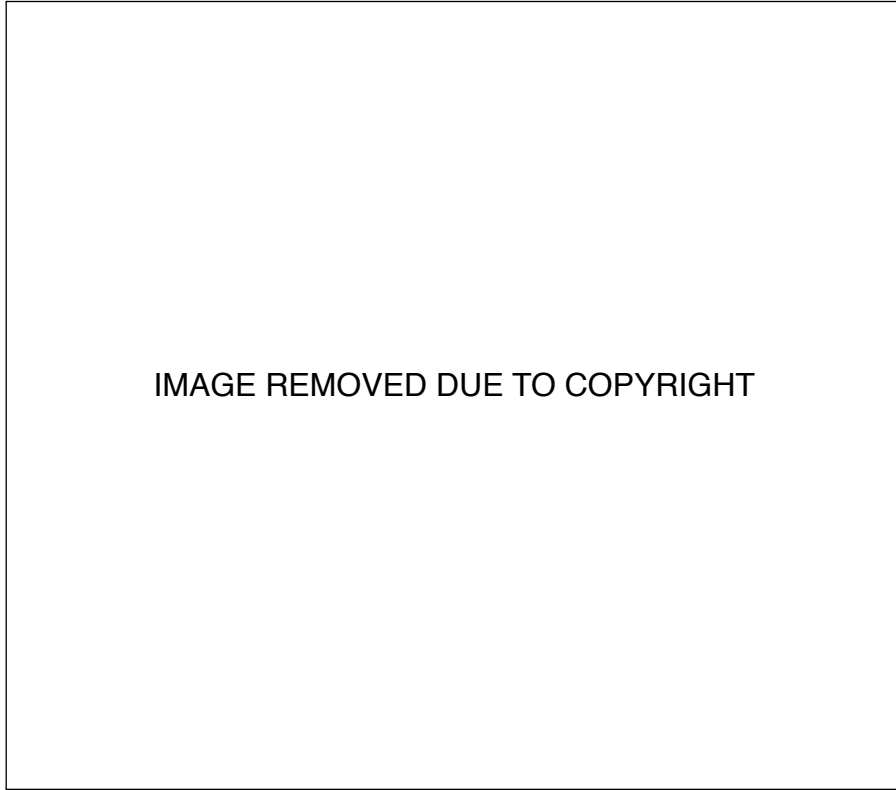


Figure 2. Pipsan's drawings for jewellery, age 6, undated [ca. 1911] (Saarinen Family Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

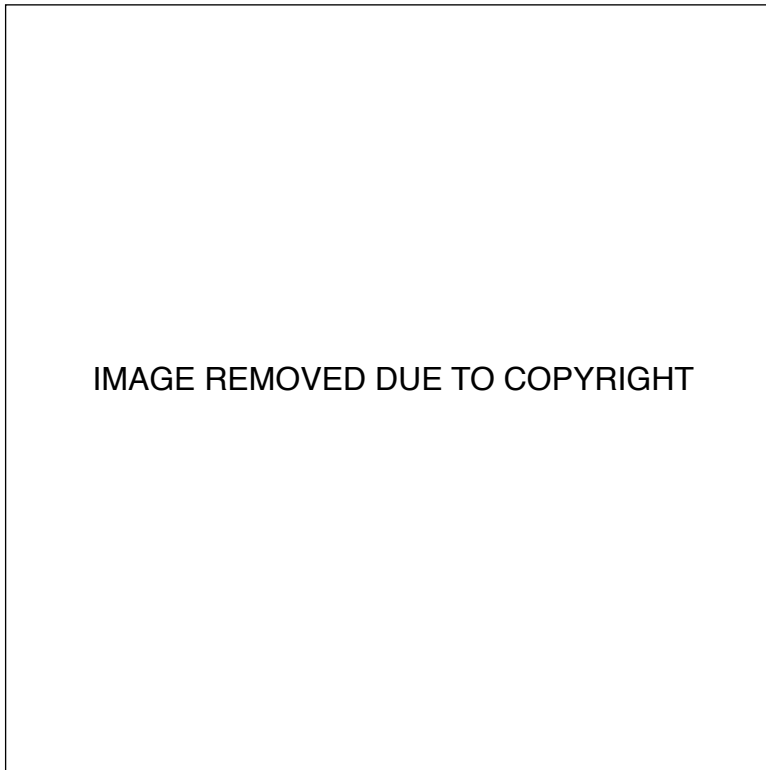


Figure 3. Pipsan's drawings for cutlery, age 7, undated [ca. 1912] (Saarinen Family Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 4. Top and left: batik textiles designed and made by Loja (*Detroit News*, 16 Dec. 1923)

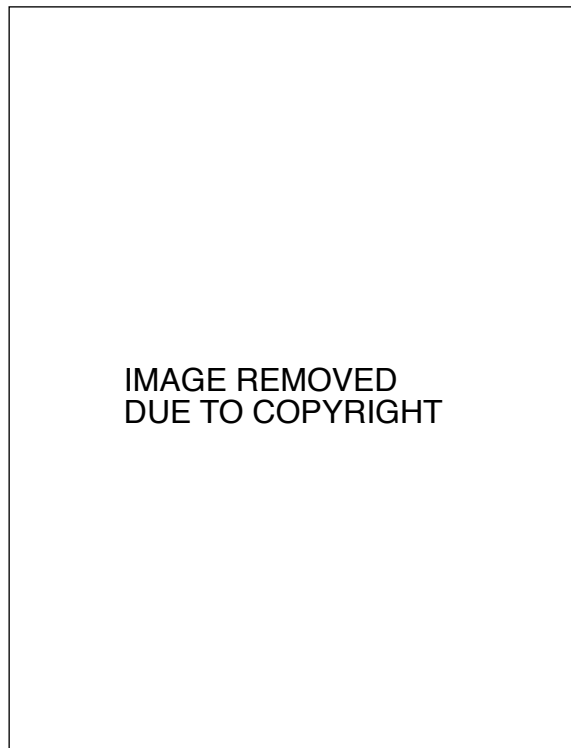


Figure 5. Batik shawl, designed and made by Loja, early 1900s (National Museum of Finland, 90010: 7, photograph by Leena Svinhufvud)

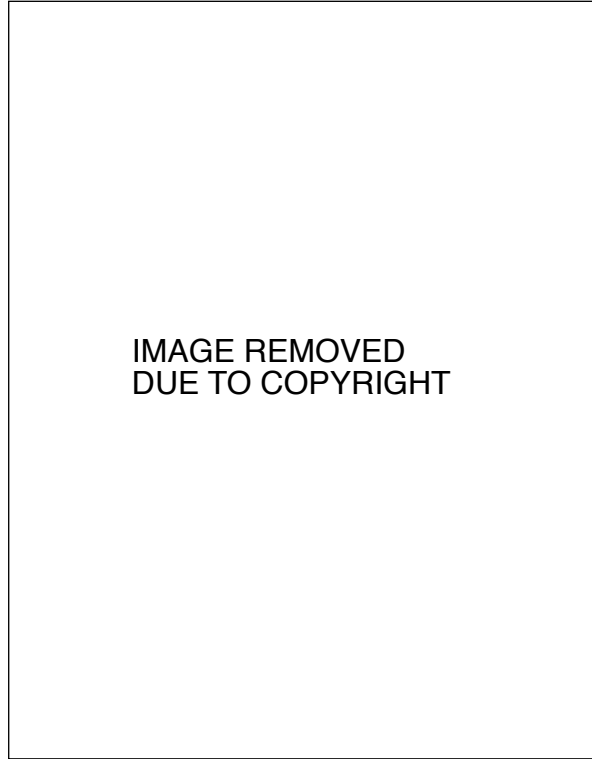


Figure 6. Batik shawl, designed and made by Pipsan, 1922 (National Museum of Finland, H2006105: 10)

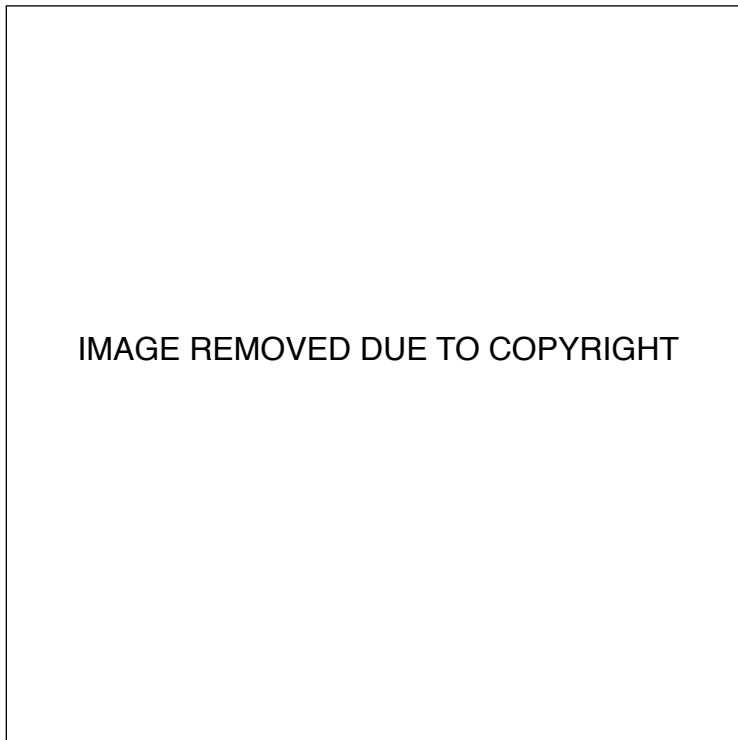


Figure 7. Batik shawl, designed and made by Pipsan, 1922 (National Museum of Finland, H2006105: 9)

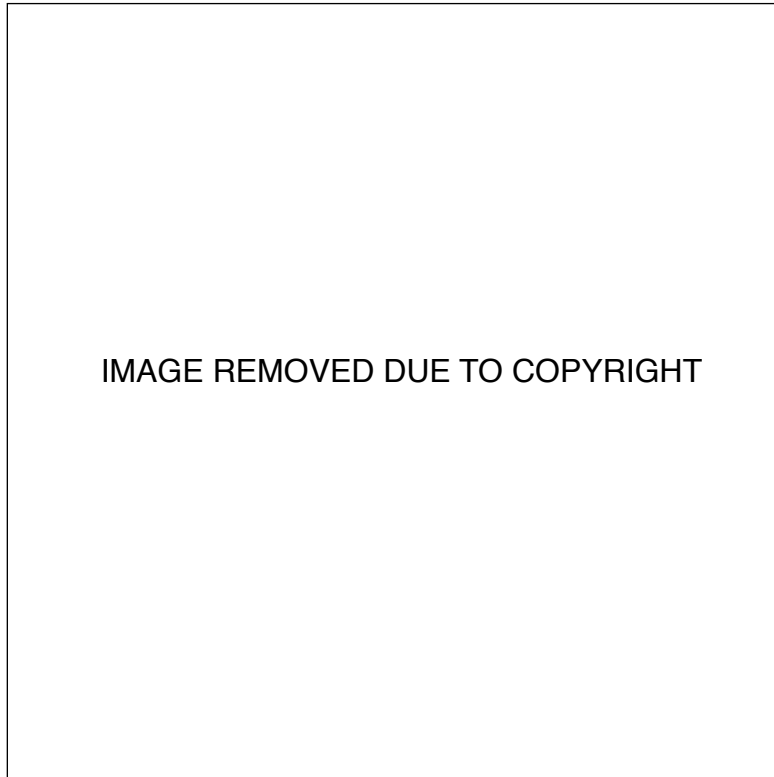


Figure 8. Ceiling surface decoration, designed by Eliel, Lahti Town Hall, Finland, completed 1912 (Hausen, *Eliel Saarinen: Projects, 1896-1923*, 183)



Figure 9. Ceiling surface decoration, designed by Eliel, early 1900s, Hvitträsk, Kirkkonummi, Finland (photograph by the author)

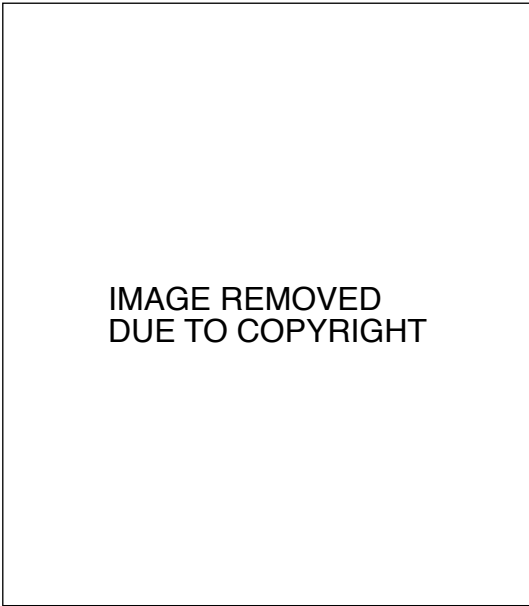


Figure 10. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

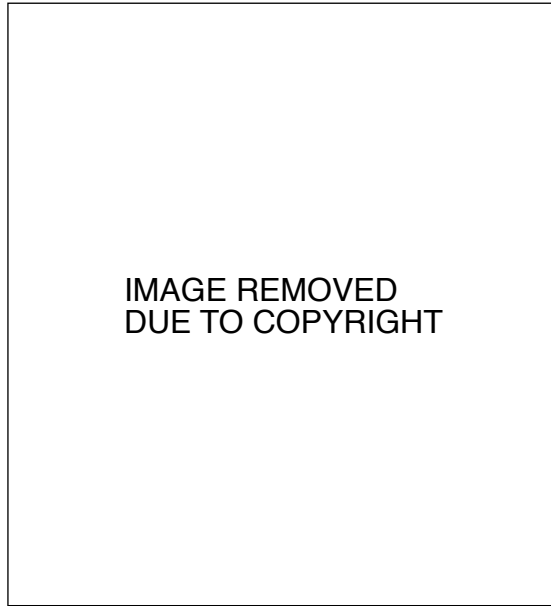


Figure 11. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

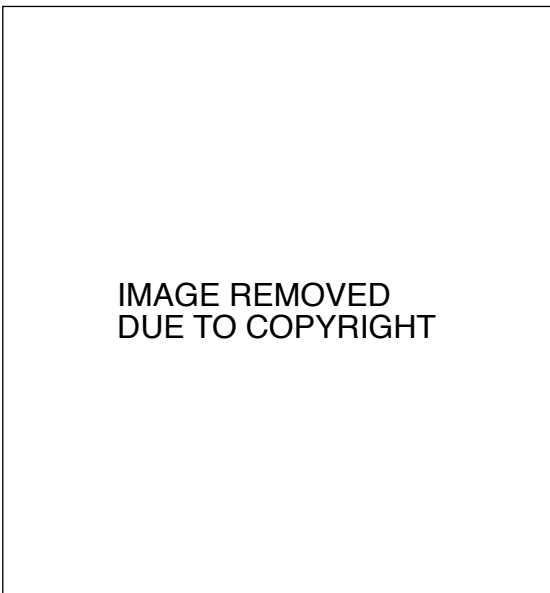


Figure 12. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

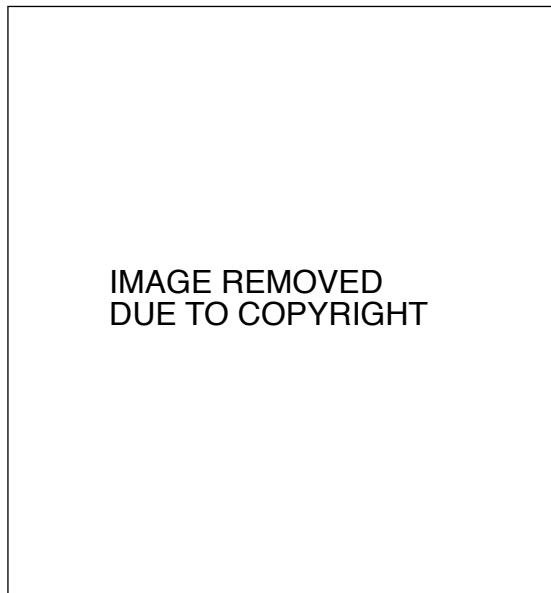


Figure 13. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

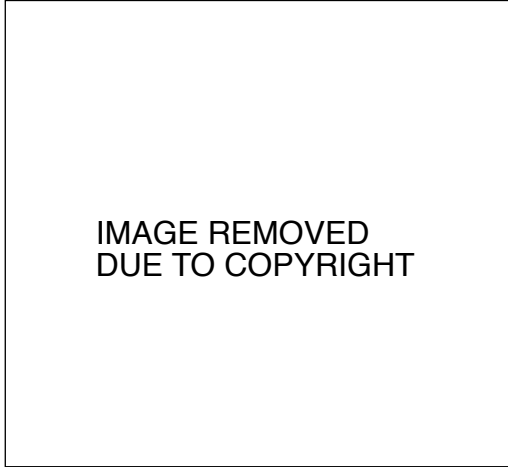


Figure 14. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

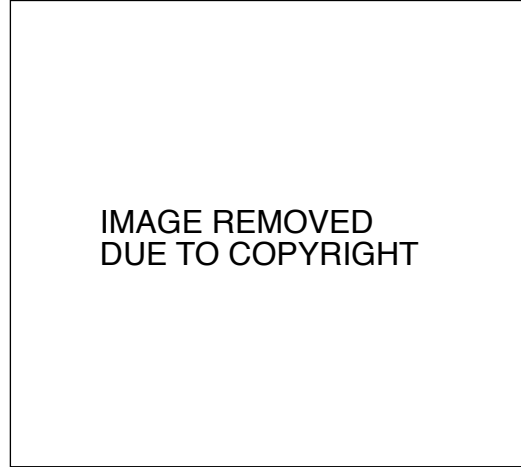


Figure 15. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

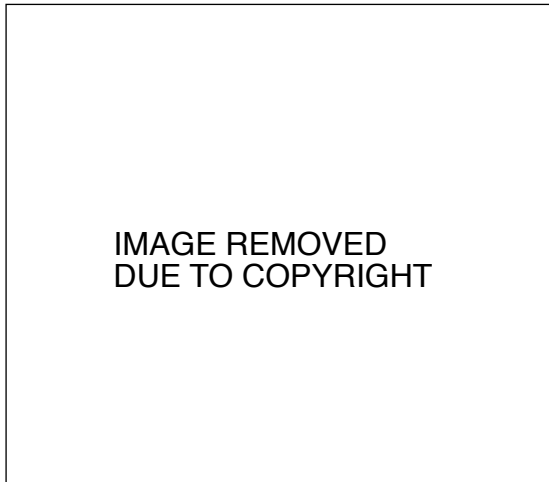


Figure 16. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

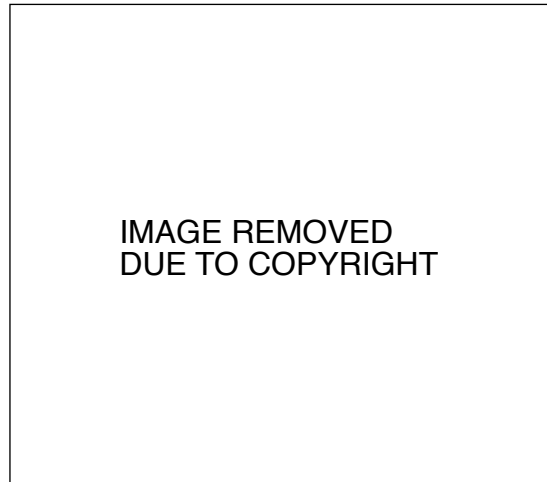


Figure 17. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

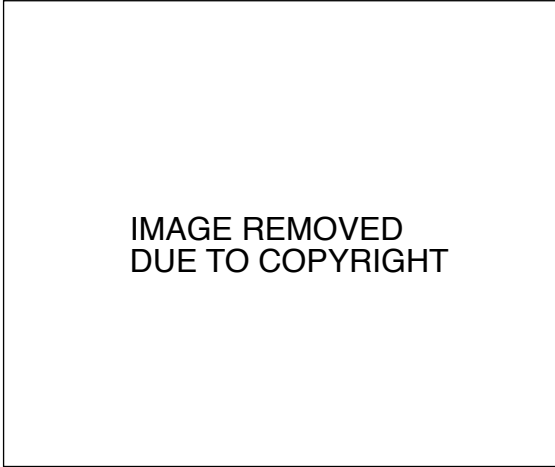


Figure 18. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

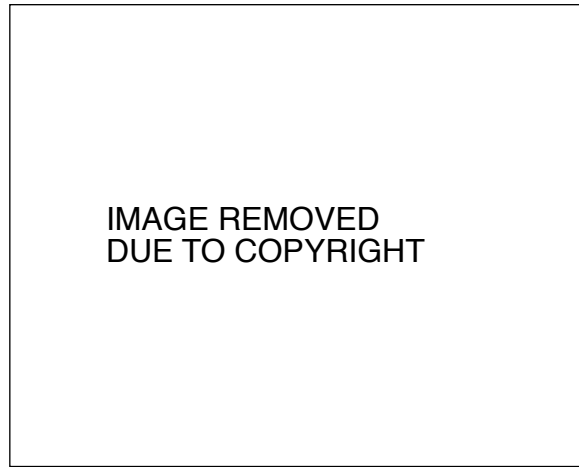


Figure 19. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

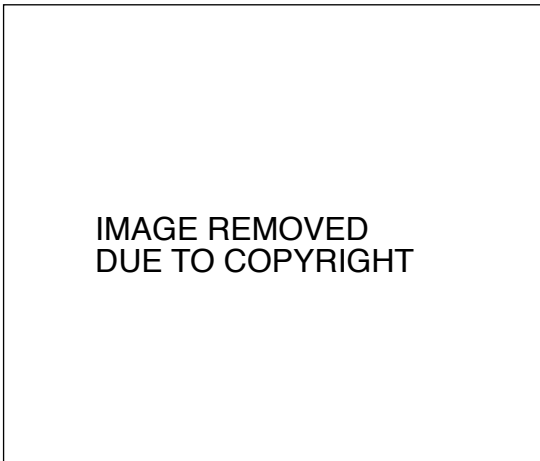


Figure 20. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

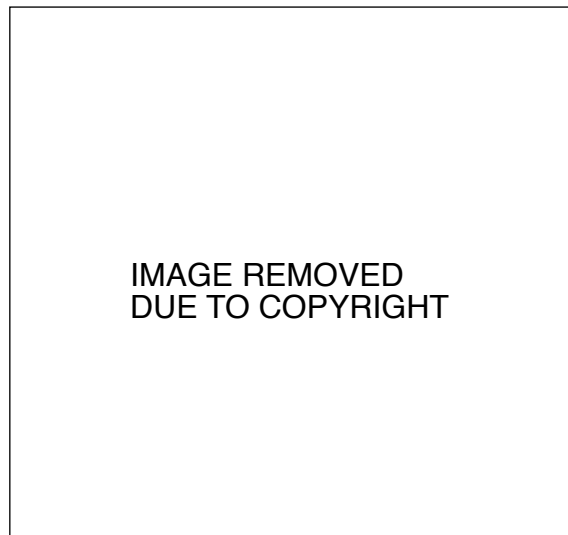


Figure 21. Pipsan's watercolour for repeat pattern, undated [1910s-early 1920s] (Swanson Associates Records, Inc., Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 22. Pipsan, Loja, and Eero, ca. 1916, at Hvitträsk, Kirkkonummi, Finland (Eliel Saarinen Collection, Museum of Finnish Architecture). The pattern of Eero's garment was designed by E. J. Wimmer-Wisgrill (see Volker, *Wiener Werkstätte Textiles*, 62).

IMAGE REMOVED  
DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 23. Repeat pattern, designed by Josef Hoffmann for the Wiener Werkstätte, 1910-1913 (Völker, *Textiles of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 82). This is the print of Pipsan's dress in figure 22.



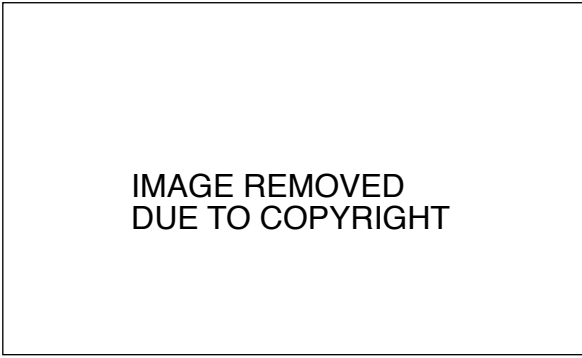


Figure 24. Repeat pattern, designed by Karl Riedel for the Wiener Werkstätte, 1910-1911 (Völker, *Textiles of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 50)



Figure 25. Repeat pattern, designed by Eduard J. Wimmer-Wisgrill for the Wiener Werkstätte, 1910-1911 (Völker, *Textiles of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 42)

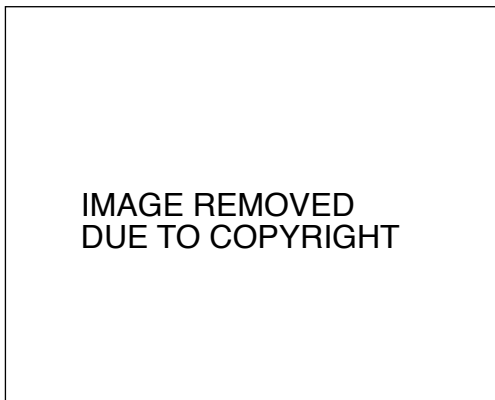


Figure 26. Repeat pattern, designed by Mitzi Vogel for the Wiener Werkstätte, 1910-1911 (Völker, *Textiles of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 75)

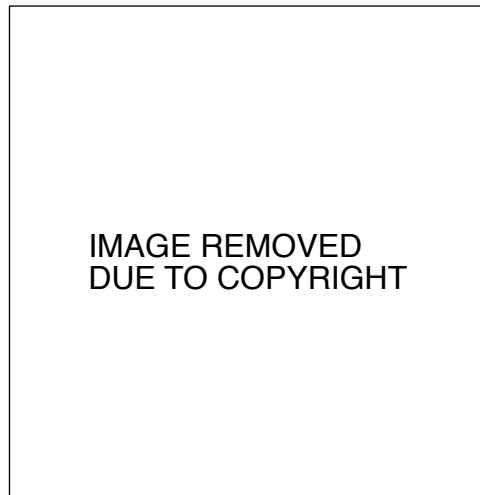


Figure 27. Repeat pattern, designed by Lotte Frömel-Fochler for the Wiener Werkstätte, 1910-1911 (Völker, *Textiles of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 207)

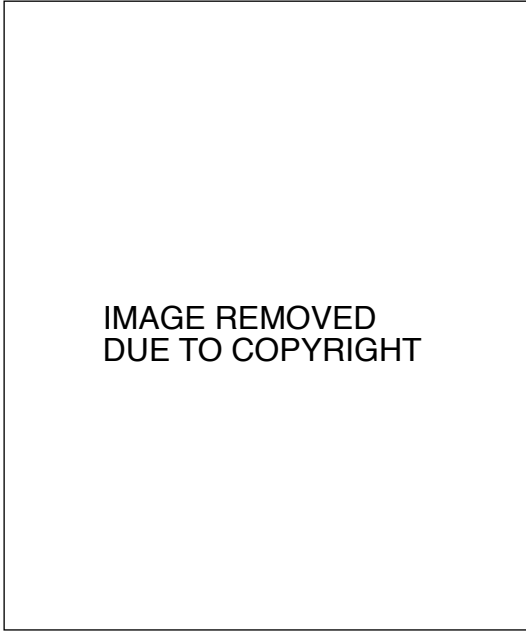


Figure 28. Atelier Martine textile, ca. 1920  
(Metropolitan Museum of Art website, 23.178.8)

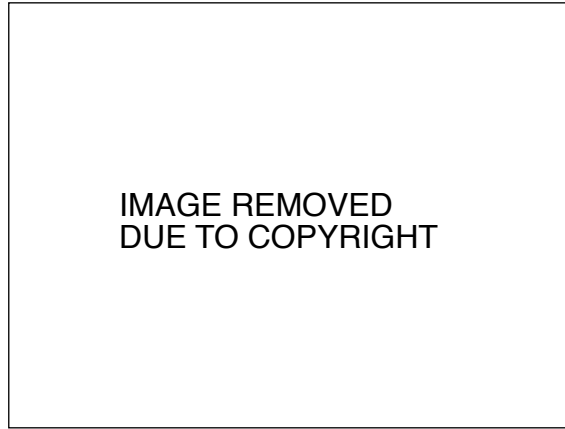


Figure 29. Atelier Martine dress fabric, 1919 (Victoria  
and Albert Museum website, T.541-1919)

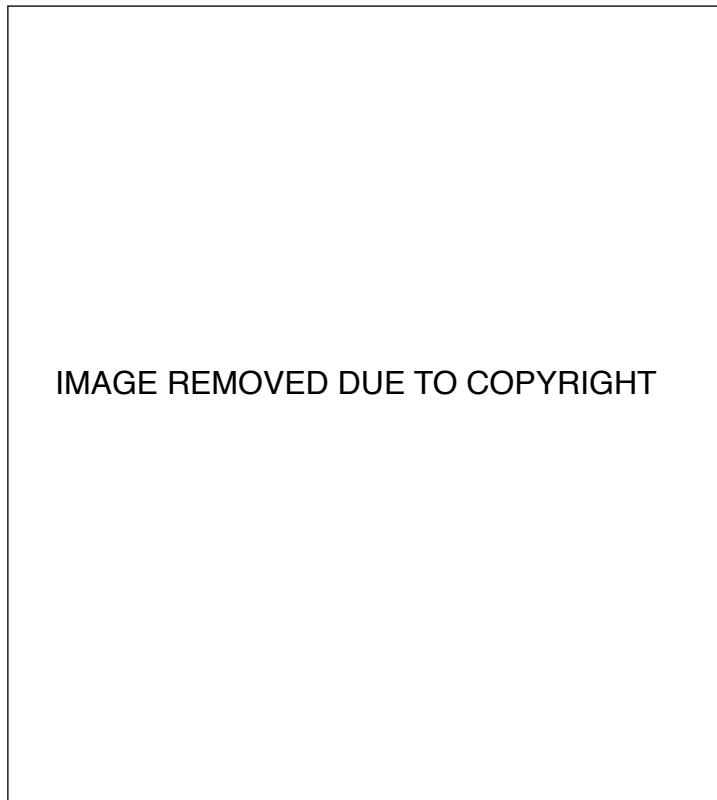


Figure 30. Atelier Martine textile, ca. 1923 (Philadelphia Museum of  
Art website, 2016-52-1)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 31. Ceiling surface decoration, designed by Pipsan, ca. 1927, Cranbrook School academic building entryway, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (photograph by the author)

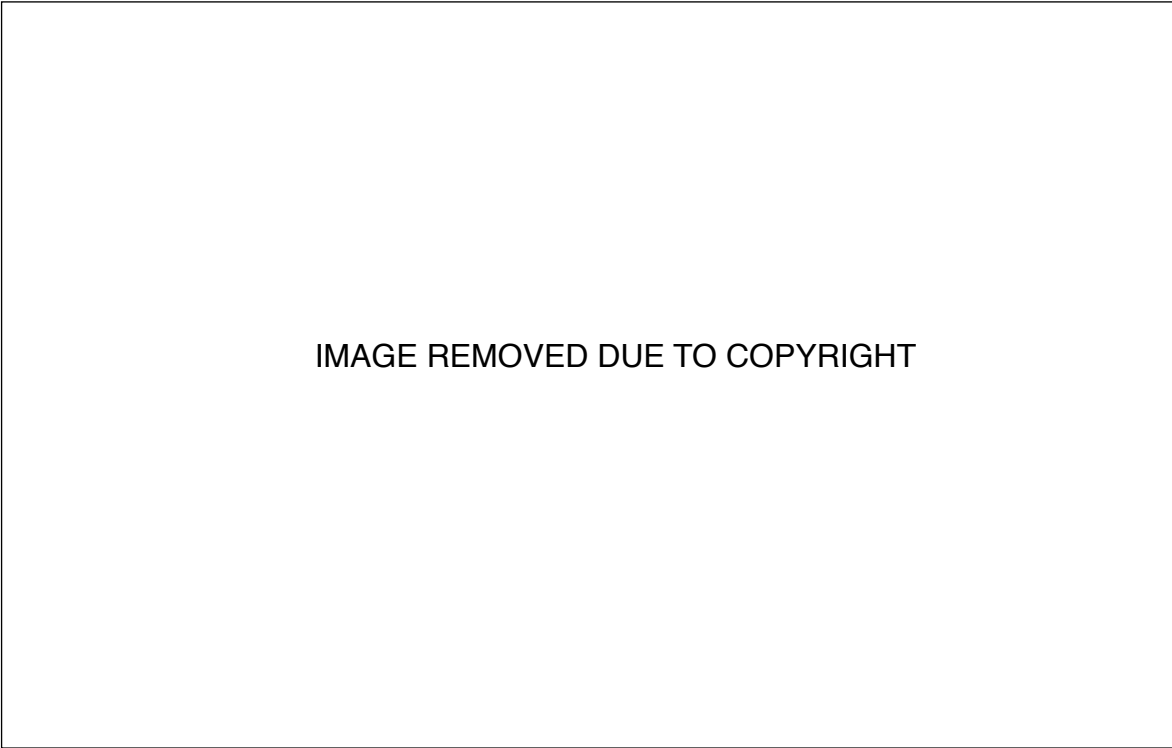


Figure 32. Stage curtain and surface decorations, designed by Pipsan, ca. 1931, Kingswood School Cranbrook auditorium, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

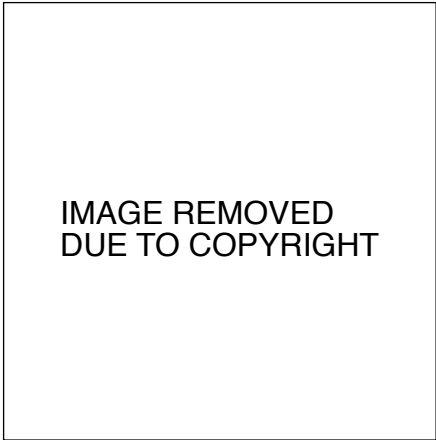


Figure 33. Stencil decoration on shutter door, designed by Pipsan, ca. 1931, Kingswood School Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (photograph by the author)

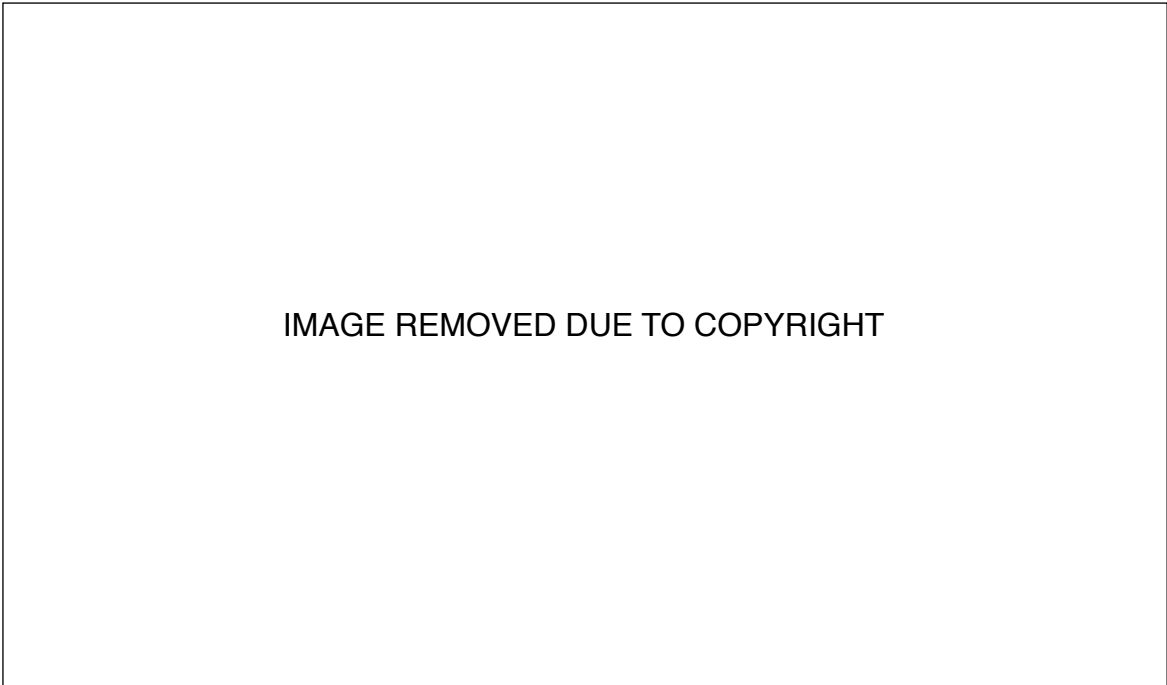


Figure 34. Surface decorations, designed by Pipsan, ca. 1931, Kingswood School Cranbrook ballroom, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

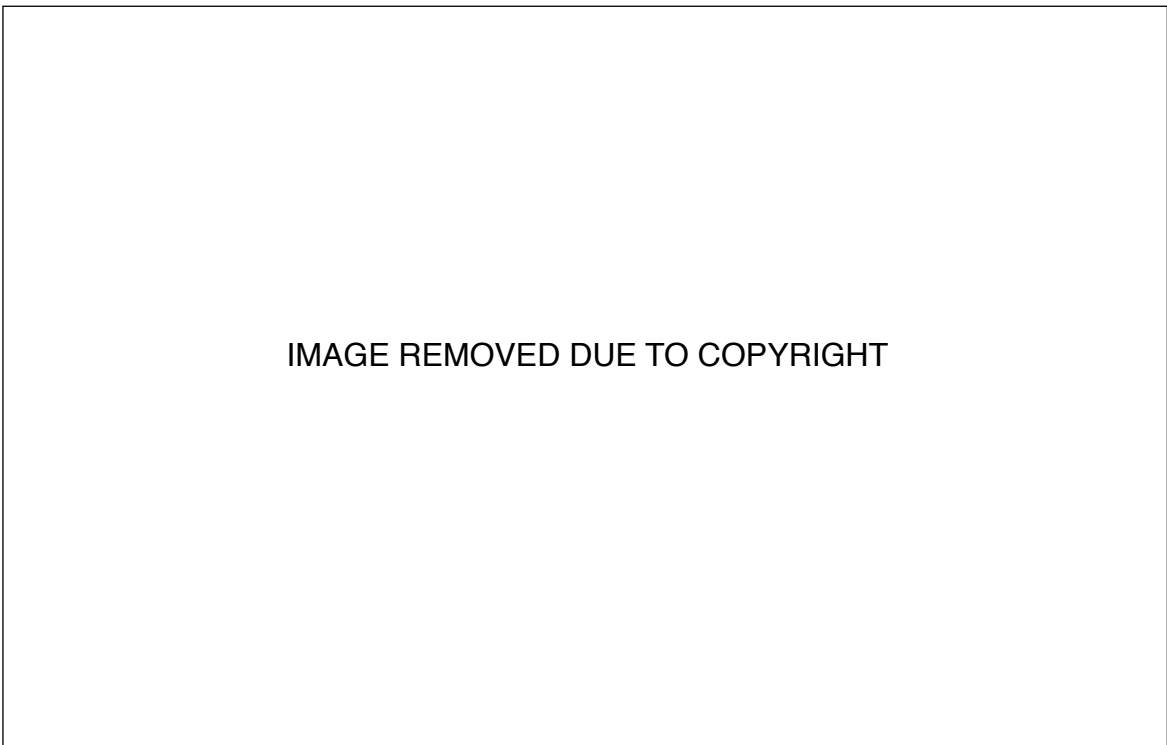


Figure 35. Model dining room, designed by Eliel, displayed at *The Architect and the Industrial Arts* exhibition, 1929, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art website). Pipsan designed the textile wall covering.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 36. Model living room, designed by Pipsan and Bob, displayed at the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, 1935, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). Pipsan designed the curtain textile and Bob designed the globe stand, coffee table, bar buffet, and card table.



Figure 37. Ceiling surface decoration, designed by Eliel, early 1900s, Hvitträsk entrance hall, Kirkkonummi, Finland (Pallasmaa, *Hvitträsk: The Home as a Work of Art*, 80)

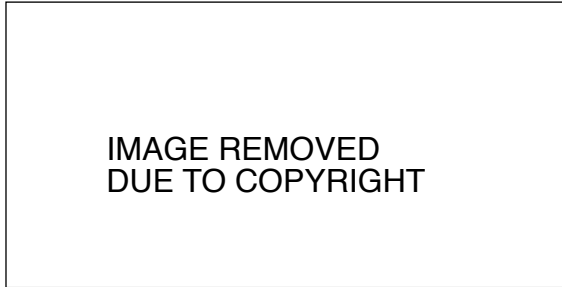


Figure 38. Ceiling surface decoration, designed by Eliel, ca. 1908, Hvitträsk nursery, Kirkkonummi, Finland (Pallasmaa, *Hvitträsk: The Home as a Work of Art*, 101)

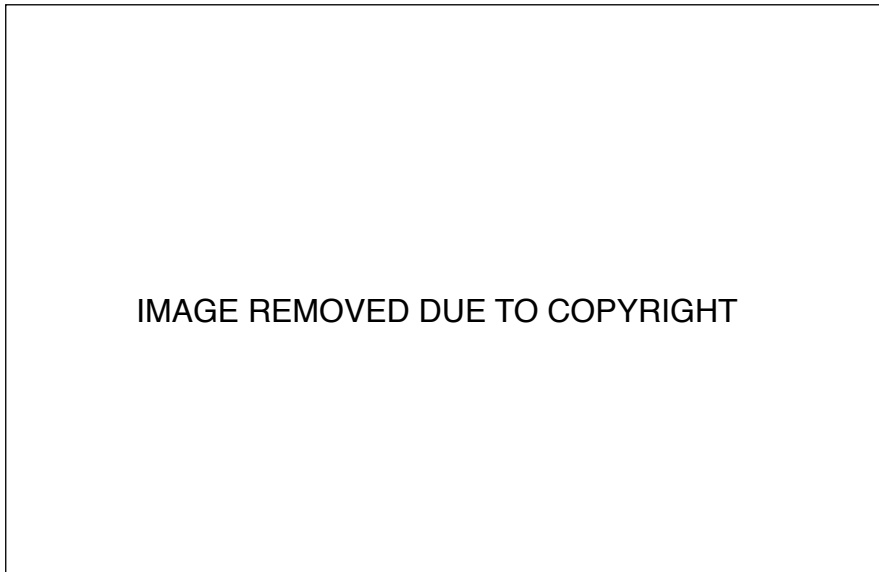


Figure 39. Eliel's watercolour for ceiling surface decoration, 1902, Hvittorp villa, Kirkkonummi, Finland (Hausen, *Eliel Saarinen: Projects, 1896-1923*, 131)

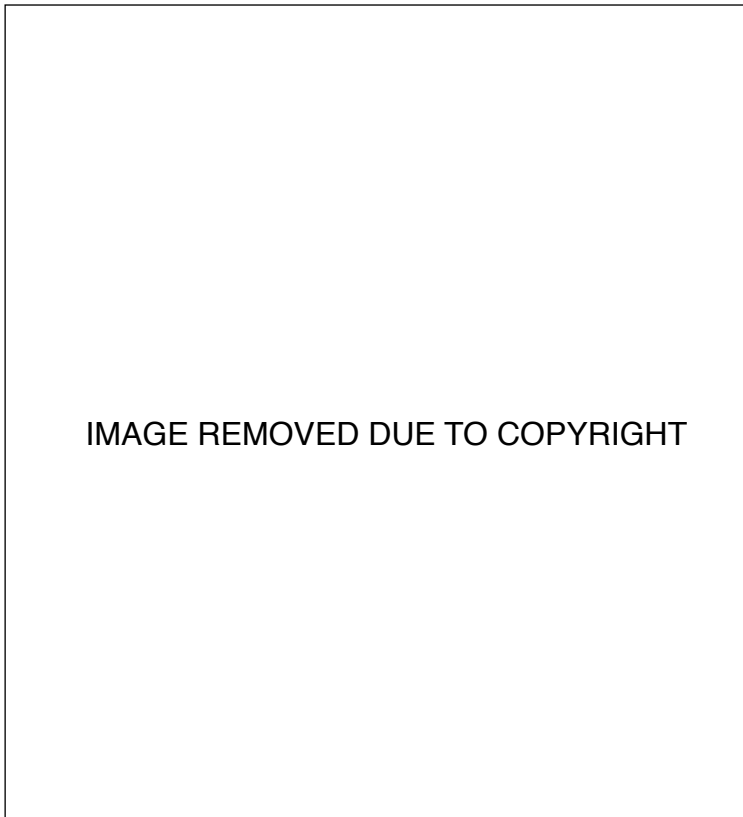


Figure 40. Steering wheel patent drawing, designed by Pipsan, 1929 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

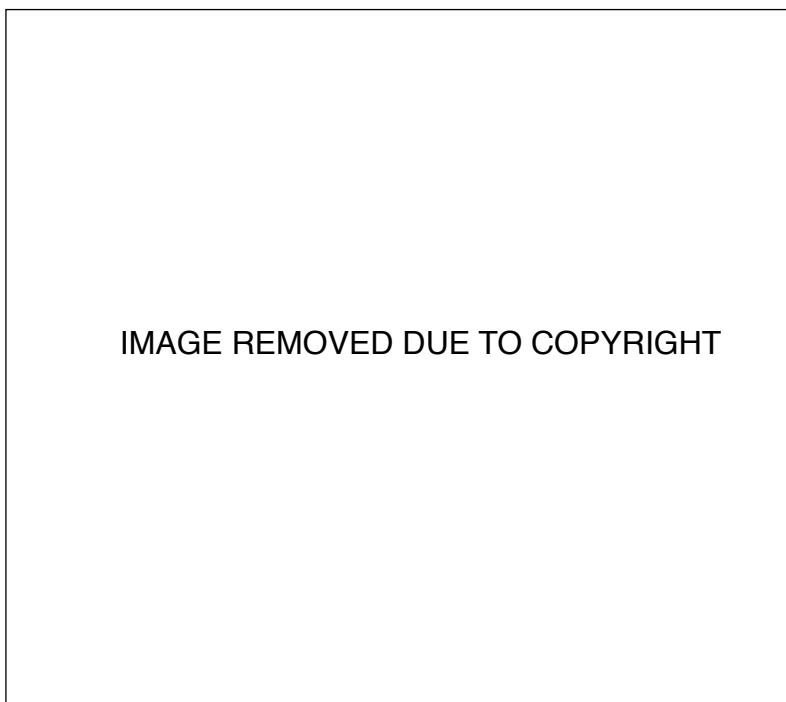


Figure 41. Kingswood School Cranbrook entrance exterior, designed by Eliel, ca. 1930, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (photograph by the author)



## Chapter 2: From Interior Decorating to Interior Design (1929-ca. 1940)

Shortly after beginning to contribute to interiors designed by her father, and around the same time she was exploring various areas of other paid design work, Pipsan also began working as an interior decorator in her own right. In 1929, she started designing modern interiors for Bob's residential architecture. Her decorating practice was slow to start; in the first half of the 1930s, Pipsan also pursued dressmaking work. In the second half of the decade, she came to focus on interiors, and she thereafter took steps to legitimize and professionalize her work and image. For her early decorating jobs, she commissioned local craftspeople to fabricate custom furniture and textiles, and she also asked manufacturers to make custom pieces as well as customized versions of catalogue products. The development of Pipsan's early career in interiors, combined with her family's strained finances, set the stage for her to embark into mass-production design.

### Interior decorating

In the late 1920s, Bob was active designing homes for Detroit-area residents. One of his clients wanted modern interiors for the modern home Bob designed for him, but, according to Pipsan, "no Decorator in Detroit had the slightest idea what 'Modern' was all about," and because of this, she was "literally forced into" the work.<sup>1</sup> Pipsan felt an affinity for interior decorating because of her father's example, explaining that the work "was not at all foreign to me as my father, Eliel Saarinen and most of his contemporaries in Scandinavia, Germany, Holland and Austria designed the Interiors [*siz*] and Furnishings [*siz*] for their jobs."<sup>2</sup> In doing so, Eliel expressed his commitment to designing total built environments. As discussed in the Introduction, architects (who were usually men) often designed the interiors of their buildings and other men also commonly provided interior

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<sup>1</sup> Pipsan to Ann Stacy, Executive Director, Michigan Society of Architects, 29 July 1969, box 7, folder 8, SP.

<sup>2</sup> Pipsan to Stacy.

decorating services. But by the 1920s, many high-profile women practiced interior decorating as a discrete activity. Because of the path paved by these women, when Pipsan established an interior decorating department within her husband's office in 1929, she was not challenging the boundaries of socially acceptable female work.<sup>3</sup>

Pipsan's first known decorating job was completed in 1929 for Gordon Mendelssohn, a wealthy Bloomfield Hills resident for whom Bob had designed a home in the mid-1920s.<sup>4</sup> For the interiors, Pipsan procured furniture from a variety of outlets, such as the Swedish Arts and Crafts Company, Stickley Brothers Furniture Co., Century Furniture Co., Eugene Schoen, Modernage, Johnson Furniture Co., B. Altman and Company, a Detroit department store called Crowley Milner, and a Michigan furniture dealer. She sourced lamps from Stern Brothers and Lord and Taylor and she imported textiles from Finland. Pipsan also commissioned custom furnishings from her family members: rugs woven at Studio Loja Saarinen and tiles sculpted by Eero. To Pipsan, providing custom furnishings to clients probably seemed like an obvious way to complete an interior because her father's interior design work in the United States and Finland relied largely on custom-made furnishings.<sup>5</sup> For Pipsan's Mendelssohn job, combining select custom furnishings with many catalogue or ready-made items resulted in an extremely expensive interior. The total decorating bill for the residence came to \$27,771.61. Of this, Pipsan's decorating fee was 25%—\$6,942.90.<sup>6</sup> Pipsan's earnings alone was a high sum, considering the median value of owned houses in 1930 was

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<sup>3</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>4</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1946], box 8, folder 11, SP; "Quartermore: The Home of Mr. Gordon Mendelssohn," *Afterglow* (MI), July 1925: 10-11; Gordon Mendelssohn's father Louis Mendelssohn made a fortune in the automobile industry earlier in the century. Louis had invested in the Fisher Body Corporation, an automotive company that was taken over by General Motors in 1926. R. H. Coase, "The Acquisition of Fisher Body by General Motors," *Journal of Law & Economics* 43, no. 1 (2000): 15-32.

<sup>5</sup> Amberg, "Catalogue of Works," 222-45; Wittkopp, *Saarinen House*.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Mendelssohn decorating itemization, 12 June 1929, box 1, folder 5, SP; "Mendelssohn Interior," undated, box 1, folder 5, SP; Gordon Mendelssohn Decorating Account Statement, 1 Nov. 1929, box 1, folder 5, SP; "Payments made to J. Robert F. Swanson from December 1, 1928 to March 14, 1930," box 1, folder 5, SP.

\$4,778.<sup>7</sup>

After this breakout job, Pipsan had little interior decorating work over the next five years, possibly due in part to the Depression. From 1932 to 1934, Pipsan had no known work in interiors.<sup>8</sup> During this lull, Pipsan was pursuing the dressmaking work discussed in chapter 1.

In 1936, after several years attempting to work in various capacities, and following a modest improvement in the economy, Pipsan's interior decorating work picked up.<sup>9</sup> From 1936 into 1937, she completed at least five jobs. Mendelssohn hired her twice more, to redecorate a wing of his Michigan residence and his summer home in Millbrook, New York, and three other families in the Detroit area commissioned Pipsan to decorate houses designed by Bob.<sup>10</sup>

By 1936, possibly to complete the influx of decorating jobs, Pipsan established her own business.<sup>11</sup> Conducting business—by buying from wholesalers and selling the products to clients—was integral in the service provided by an interior decorator. As was common, Pipsan's fee for a job was a commission, usually 25%, added on to her costs for furnishings and labour.<sup>12</sup> For Pipsan's first decorating job in 1929, payments had been made to Bob, as he was head of the architecture office out of which she conducted her practice.<sup>13</sup> Although Pipsan's business still operated out of Bob's office, having her own business could give her a degree of authority and independence.

When Pipsan tried to open accounts with manufacturers and distributors in 1936, however,

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1942* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1943), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Clare M. Jickling documents, box 10, folder 24, SAR; Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; Bob to Thomas F. Maloney, Credit Manager, Stroheim & Romann, 13 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 288-89.

<sup>10</sup> Bob or Pipsan to Gordon Mendelssohn, 23 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP; Decorating itemizations for Gordon Mendelssohn residences in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan and Millbrook, New York, box 1, folder 13, SP; "Guests View New Painting," *Detroit Free Press*, 30 May 1936; Jeffries residence documents, 1936-1937, box 1, folders 18-20, SP; Calingaert residence documents, 1936-1937, box 1, folders 15-16, SP; Stern residence documents, 1937, box 2, folder 3, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, ca. 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Bob to A. M. Hoffman, Assistant Credit Manager, Heywood-Wakefield Company, 10 April 1936, box 1, folder 9, SP.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Gordon Mendelssohn Millbrook, New York Decorating Account, undated [1936], box 1, folder 13, SP; Calingaert accounting books, undated [1936-1937], box 1, folder 16, SP; Edward J. Jeffries Decorating Account, 8 Jan. 1937, box 1, folder 20, SP.

<sup>13</sup> "Payments Made to J. Robert F. Swanson."

she was met with resistance. Because she had not established her own credit, Heywood-Wakefield Company hesitated to grant her their standard credit limit, which would mean she would have to pay for part of the order on delivery.<sup>14</sup> For the same reason, the Herman Miller Furniture Company was reluctant to fulfil one of Pipsan's orders and the Hastings Table Company (a Widdicomb Furniture Co. distributor) required an up-front cash deposit.<sup>15</sup> Another time, when Pipsan requested textile samples on memorandum from Stroheim & Romann, the company questioned her intentions to purchase and asked that she either buy the sample lengths outright or prove her credit standing.<sup>16</sup> It was, in fact, standard practice for wholesalers to require that new clients make an initial \$100-200 purchase to guarantee their "good faith" in addition to proving their financial credibility before they were granted accounts with credit.<sup>17</sup> Yet, someone starting her first business might not have enough money to make good-faith purchases at all of the vendors required to complete an interior. It would also have been difficult for someone like Pipsan, who had thus far been dependent on her husband, to prove her individual financial credibility.

In more than one instance, when met with difficulties, Bob stepped in. He explained to Heywood-Wakefield that, although the business and the business's bank account were in Pipsan's name, he was authorized to write checks from her account and bore responsibility for "the business end of the Decorating [*sic*] business."<sup>18</sup> Bob's argument was that because he was involved in the business and oversaw the finances, Heywood-Wakefield could rest assured that Pipsan's accounts would be paid. Apparently convinced, the company conceded under the condition that Bob would be held accountable for Pipsan's purchases.<sup>19</sup> To Stroheim & Romann, Bob wrote, "To explain what

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<sup>14</sup> Correspondence between Pipsan and Heywood-Wakefield, 18 March-18 April 1936, box 1, folders 8-9, SP.

<sup>15</sup> R. Broene, Hastings Table Company employee, to Pipsan, 9 Oct. 1936, Box 1, folder 19, SP; Herman Miller Furniture Company to Pipsan, 27 Oct. 1936, Box 1, folder 19, SP.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F. Maloney, Credit Manager, Stroheim & Romann, to Pipsan, 10 March 1936, Box 1, folder 8, SP.

<sup>17</sup> "How Can I Open a Decorative Business?" *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 86, no. 1 (15 Jan. 1931): 109-10, 133.

<sup>18</sup> Bob to A. M. Hoffman, Assistant Credit Manager, Heywood-Wakefield Company, 10 April 1936 and 18 April 1936, box 1, folder 9, SP.

<sup>19</sup> A. M. Hoffman, Assistant Credit Manager, Heywood-Wakefield Company, to Bob, 16 April 1936, box 1, folder 9, SP.

may seem to be a somewhat unusual financial report and also business resume, I would like to say that Mrs. Swanson's decorating is somewhat different than is normally done. The majority of the decorating work is done in connection with my architectural work."<sup>20</sup> Apparently, because Pipsan was associated with a professional architect who had established credit, Stroheim & Romann granted Pipsan their standard credit terms.<sup>21</sup> Opening accounts was a critical step for Pipsan's interior decorating practice that would allow her to buy through the trade. With Bob's assistance and through a connection to him, Pipsan was able to get her business off the ground and complete the surge of interiors work that had come her way.

#### Catalogue, custom, and customized furnishings

For all the 1936 to 1937 interiors, Pipsan mixed mass-produced furnishings with custom pieces, as she had done for her first job in 1929. She purchased catalogue textiles from established manufacturers and distributors such as J. H. Thorp & Co., Inc., F. Schumacher & Co., and Stroheim & Romann, which she used in conjunction with textiles handwoven at Studio Loja Saarinen. Pipsan sourced catalogue furniture from companies known for producing high-quality modern furniture, including a large amount from Herman Miller as well as Heywood-Wakefield and Widdicomb.<sup>22</sup> Pipsan, however, had difficulty finding furniture on the market in the modern style she sought, so she commissioned custom cabinets, bookcases, beds, benches, a seat, a table, a radio cabinet, and a desk from local craftspeople.<sup>23</sup> The combination of custom furnishings with high-quality factory-produced ones resulted in client decorating bills that ranged dramatically, from about \$3,000 to over

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<sup>20</sup> Bob to Maloney.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas F. Maloney, Credit Manager, Stroheim & Romann, to Pipsan, 17 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP.

<sup>22</sup> See invoices, itemizations, and account statements in box 1, folders 13, 16, 19, 20 SP.

<sup>23</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; Pipsan curriculum vitae, ca. 1971, box 9, folder 5, SP; Grace Miller, "Husband and Wife Cooperate, Designing Modern Houses and Furnishings," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 Aug. 1948 Lilian Jackson Braun, "The Nation's Architects Honor Mrs. Swanson," *Detroit Free Press*, 19 April 1971; Harold Broock, General Building Contractor and Engineer, to Bob, 13 July 1936, box 1, folder 15, SP; Calingaert accounting books; "Decorating: Jeffries Residence," ca. 1936, Box 1, folder 20, SP.

\$19,000.<sup>24</sup> These were, however, all expensive jobs, the least expensive one costing Pipsan's client more money than what 92% of the population made in a year.<sup>25</sup>

Custom furnishings made by local craftspeople were too expensive for some clients.<sup>26</sup> In attempt to reduce costs, Pipsan asked manufacturers of modern furniture to make customized and custom-made pieces. In 1936, she asked Heywood-Wakefield if one of their side chairs could be made without its arms and with the legs moved in slightly. Pipsan wanted eighteen of such modified chairs, each exactly seventeen inches wide so they could be set together like "a continuing bench" that perfectly fitted a particular wall.<sup>27</sup> Initially the company refused Pipsan's request because the quantity of chairs was not sufficient to make the special run profitable for them. But later they offered to make up a slightly different style of chair in the dimensions Pipsan desired. She declined the offer, and it is not known how or if she eventually realized her plan.<sup>28</sup> Several years later, Pipsan once again pleaded with Heywood-Wakefield to alter another catalogue item as well as to make entirely new pieces. This time they denied her request for the "special pieces," imploring her to "restrict your selection to the furniture as actually shown in our catalog."<sup>29</sup> Other companies were similarly resistant to Pipsan's inquiries. When she asked the Elgin A. Simonds Company, Inc. to make two custom table designs, they would consent only if Pipsan also purchased items from their catalogue since the quantity of custom tables she requested was not enough to be profitable.<sup>30</sup> At other times, companies flat-out refused to meet Pipsan's requests, such as Widdicomb when she

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<sup>24</sup> "Jeffries Decorating Account," undated [1937], box 1, folder 20, SP; "Costs—Decorating for Gordon Mendelssohn at Bloomfield Hills, Mich.," undated [1936], box 1, folder 13, SP; Calingaert accounting books.

<sup>25</sup> Wandersee, "Economics of Middle-Income Family Life," 48.

<sup>26</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; Pipsan CV, ca. 1971; Miller, "Husband and Wife Cooperate"; Braun, "Nation's Architects"; Bob, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 7 Feb. 1980, box 4, tape 203, COHI.

<sup>27</sup> Pipsan to T. D. Hoover, Heywood-Wakefield Company employee, 18 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP.

<sup>28</sup> T. D. Hoover, Heywood-Wakefield Company employee, to Pipsan, 23 March and 2 April 1936, box 1, folders 8 and 9, SP.

<sup>29</sup> Correspondence between Pipsan and Heywood-Wakefield, 23 and 29 April 1940, box 2, folder 6, SP.

<sup>30</sup> Clyde Verkerke, Secretary, Elgin A. Simonds Company, Inc., to Pipsan, 6 February 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP.

asked the company to make one of their chair designs without arms.<sup>31</sup>

It is not known who designed the custom furniture for Pipsan's interiors.<sup>32</sup> Possibly Bob was involved because he had expressed interest in furniture design. In the early 1930s, he had designed two pieces for the Saarinen residence, and, as discussed in chapter 1, when Pipsan and Bob designed a model living room together for the 1935 Cranbrook *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, Bob designed the furniture.<sup>33</sup> He had also become involved in Pipsan's work designing car interiors for Packard around 1930, so he may have been willing or eager to get involved in her residential interior decorating work too. Indeed, although Pipsan was in charge of interiors for their joint architectural-interiors commissions, when one of Pipsan's 1936 to 1937 interiors was selected for publication in a book by James and Katherine Morrow Ford, Bob claimed that he provided many "suggestions" on her interiors and worked on the design of furnishings used in them.<sup>34</sup> On at least one occasion in the mid-1930s, Bob designed another type of furnishing besides furniture that Pipsan used in her interiors: a candelabrum for one of her Mendelssohn jobs, discussed below.<sup>35</sup> Evidencing Bob's growing interest in design as well as architecture, he identified as an "architect and designer" by 1938.<sup>36</sup>

It is also possible that Pipsan was involved in designing the custom furniture for her interiors. She almost certainly was the one to tweak the designs of catalogue items. When shopping for furniture for clients, she probably found pieces that were close to what she sought, but not quite perfect, so she tried to have the manufacturers alter them. Requesting customized versions of catalogue items may have been her first experiments in furniture design, after which, designing

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<sup>31</sup> Correspondence between Pipsan and Widdicomb, 1940, box 2, folder 7, SP.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of the design of the custom furniture Pipsan used in the 1936 to 1937 interiors.

<sup>33</sup> Wittkopp, *Saarinen House*, 125, 163n80.

<sup>34</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1951], box 8, folder 11, SP; Bob to James Ford, Professor, Harvard University, 15 March 1939, box 9, folder 13, SP.

<sup>35</sup> Pipsan to Mr. Stalker, Stalker & Boos auction house, 23 July 1975, box 1, folder 17, SP.

<sup>36</sup> Bob's stationery, 1938, box 8, folder 3, SP. The letterhead of Bob's stationery was printed with "architect and designer."

pieces from scratch might have seemed like a logical next step. Indeed, some interior decorators, including several prominent women, designed custom furniture for their commissions.<sup>37</sup> Eliel had also designed everything from textiles to lamps to furniture for his interiors.<sup>38</sup> For Pipsan, therefore, becoming involved in designing furniture for her interiors probably seemed like a reasonable pursuit. Furthermore, by around 1938, shortly after her boost in interior decorating work, Pipsan was definitely engaged in furniture design. In collaboration with Bob as well as Eliel, she was working on a line of mass-produced furniture to be used in her interiors, discussed in chapter 3.

For her 1930s decorating jobs, Pipsan probably designed at least some of the custom textiles that were woven at Studio Loja Saarinen. Around the same time, from 1935 to 1938, Pipsan was designing and exhibiting curtains, rugs, and a tablecloth that were woven at Loja's studio.<sup>39</sup> Prior to that, Pipsan had designed custom textiles for her father's interiors; this work had been an extension of the textile work she did in adolescence.<sup>40</sup> Designing custom textiles for her 1930s interior decorating clients was a natural development. In addition to textiles woven at Loja's studio, Pipsan approached at least one textile manufacturer—the Du Pont Rayon Company Incorporated, in 1936—to produce a run of a custom ribbed textile according to her drawing.<sup>41</sup> Several years later, in 1940, she approached other textile manufacturers about making customized versions of catalogue items. She asked F. Schumacher to dye a catalogue fabric in a hue between two brown colours they offered; she asked Howard and Schaffer, Inc. to print one of their catalogue patterns in custom colours on a “rougher or heavier linen”; and she asked J. H. Thorp to weave one of their catalogue

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy McClelland, “Interior Decoration as a Vocation,” *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 93, no. 1 (15 July 1934): 47; Jeannette Lenygon, “Education a Foundation for Cooperation,” *Interior Decorator* 97, no. 12 (July 1938): 8; Kirkham and Sparke, “A Woman's Place,” 315; Pauline C. Metcalf, *Syrie Maugham: Staging Glamorous Interiors* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2010), 57-58. Maugham was British but had shops in Chicago and New York as well as London.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>40</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>41</sup> Pipsan to Alexis Somaripa [*sic*], Du Pont Rayon Company Incorporated employee, 4 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP. Alexis Sommaripa, Du Pont Rayon Company Incorporated employee, to Pipsan, 6 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP. Pipsan's drawing does not survive.



items with a “natural” coloured warp thread instead of their standard white warp.<sup>42</sup> In these cases, Pipsan’s typical vendors did not offer what she sought, and having custom textiles handwoven at Loja’s studio was probably prohibitively expensive. Also, Studio Loja Saarinen did not produce printed textiles, so Pipsan would have had to seek any prints she wanted elsewhere.

### From interior decorator to interior designer

Around the time Pipsan’s interiors work picked up, in 1936, she identified as an interior decorator, an occupation that had been taking steps to professionalize since early in the century.<sup>43</sup> Not all paid work was considered professional work. For an occupation to be widely accepted as a profession, it typically needed to fulfil certain criteria: the work had to have an underlying service mission, the field had to have systematic, formal training that resulted in credentials and specialized knowledge, and the field had to have professional clubs or associations.<sup>44</sup> By the late nineteenth century, many occupations including architecture had professionalized, thereby elevating the status of the work, instilling it with a sense of respect, authority, and autonomy.<sup>45</sup> The first so-called women’s occupations that attempted to professionalize, including nursing, school teaching, library science, social work, and home economics, did so in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Professionalization was a delicate process for middle-class women since it involved adopting behaviours and practices of the established professions, which were invariably male-dominated

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<sup>42</sup> Pipsan to F. Schumacher & Co., 1940, box 2, folder 7, SP; Pipsan to Howard and Schaffer, Inc., 2 March 1940, box 2, folder 5, SP; Pipsan to J. H. Thorp & Co., Inc., 1940, box 2, folder 5, SP. In all these cases, it is not known if the companies complied with Pipsan’s requests.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence with the header reading “Pipsan S. Swanson, Interior Decorator,” 1936, box 1, folders 8, 9, 15, 16, 19, box 2, folder 5, SP; Bob also referred to Pipsan’s work as “decorating.” Bob to Russel Wright, 10 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP; Bob to Heywood-Wakefield Company, 14 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP; Bob to Maloney.

<sup>44</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), x-xi; William J. Goode, “The Theoretical Limits of Professionalization,” in *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (New York: Free Press, 1969), 274-80.

<sup>45</sup> Eliot Freidson, *Professional Powers: A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 32; Samuel Haber, *The Quest for Authority and Honor in the American Professions, 1750-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), ix-xiv.

fields. Nurses, teachers, librarians, social workers, and home economists were able to professionalize while maintaining a sense of propriety because their fields were considered to be natural extensions of women's work as mothers and housewives. The feminine nature of their work eased the transition from unpaid homemaker to paid worker to professional.<sup>46</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, so too was interior decorating correlated with women's work in the home. Because decorators provided a service to their clients, the work was thought to qualify for professional status. The field gradually underwent the professionalization process by developing systematic training courses, one of the first being the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts (now Parsons School of Design) in 1904. Yet, such programs remained few through the interwar period, and many interior decorators of Pipsan's generation—Pipsan included—did not possess formal training for the work. Professional organizations were also founded, including the Women Decorators Club in 1914 and the AID (first called the American Institute of Interior Decorators) in 1931.<sup>47</sup> Pipsan became a member of the latter organization by the 1950s, but possibly much earlier.<sup>48</sup> Unlike other professions, however, there remained no set training and certification standards that regulated who could work as an interior decorator.

Another hurdle for the interior decorating field to professionalize was its close ties with commerce. As discussed, an interior decorator had to engage in business transactions. Business was traditionally seen as a different category of occupation than the professions. Indeed, a defining feature of the professions was that the driving motive in the work was, ostensibly, a service mission over accumulating personal wealth. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the interior decorating community debated whether the field should be considered a profession or a business occupation, or both.

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), 116-18.

<sup>47</sup> McNeil, "Designing Women," 639; May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland," 63-68; Grace Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (2008): 1-18.

<sup>48</sup> "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes," *Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 115.

Some believed that developing the image of interior decorators as professionals over businesspeople would more effectively garner respect for the field.<sup>49</sup>

Despite interior decorators' efforts to professionalize their field, the occupation carried unprofessional connotations in the interwar period and beyond. Interior decorators were sometimes confused with other types of "decorators," individuals who hung wallpaper or painted walls. The title of interior decorator also came to be associated with "lady decorators" who moved in high society and lacked formal training. Trade publications complained that large numbers of female "amateurs," despite lacking experience and training, had managed to infiltrate the field, working against efforts to professionalize the occupation. Partly to dissociate from the female "amateurs" and to distinguish from labourers, it became increasingly common for individuals who provided the same services as interior decorators to identify as interior *designers*. Although the two terms were often used interchangeably, the design community debated the distinction between them. Little consensus was achieved, yet the term interior designer came to be viewed by many as more modern, professional, and respected, as well as implicitly less feminine.<sup>50</sup> The loftier reputation of designers, compared to decorators, was affirmed by the United States government: the 1920 and 1930 Census categorized decorators (grouped with window dressers and drapers) under the trades, whereas "designers" appeared in the list of professions.<sup>51</sup>

For Pipsan, the connotations of femininity and unprofessionalism may not have been an issue at first. As discussed in chapter 1, she did not appear to have had definite career ambitions at the outset of her marriage. Certain other qualities associated with interior decorators may have

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<sup>49</sup> "Business or Profession," *Interior Decorator* 96, no. 7 (Feb. 1937): 17, 60-62; Herbert M. Rothschild, "Interior Decoration—A Profession?" *Interior Decorator* 96, no. 7 (Feb. 1937): 34, 62-67; "Decorating is a Business," *Interior Decorator* 98, no. 2 (Sept. 1938): 17; "A Business and Profession," *Interior Decorator* 99, no.7 (Feb. 1940): 7; James R. Patterson, "The Student Looks at His Profession," *Interiors* 100, no. 10 (May 1941): 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kirkham and Sparke, "A Woman's Place," 307-13; Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, 186-88.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1926* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927), 55, 56; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1940* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), 67, 69.

actually appealed to Pipsan. Historians Peter McNeil and Penny Sparke have written on the close relationship between interior decorating and fashion. Many high-profile interior decorators had reputations for being glamorous and fashionable, similar in image and status as couturiers. Moreover, both interior decorators and couturiers catered to wealthy clients, providing them with services and goods that helped them define and express their identity and luxurious lifestyle. Womenswear and interiors were also both involved in the fashion system, which entailed routinely changing styles, and both occupations were associated with consumption and theatricality.<sup>52</sup> As discussed, Pipsan had attempted to work as a dressmaker herself in the early 1930s—around the same time she began pursuing interior decorating work.

Like couturiers and elite interior decorators, Pipsan adopted a glamorous, fashionable identity with a flair for the theatrical. She modelled her own gowns, one time posing for a photograph that was published in a local newspaper.<sup>53</sup> According to a Bloomfield Hills resident, Pipsan had a reputation for being “very modern” and “creative to her fingertips, with a marvelous sense of color and line.”<sup>54</sup> In 1933, Pipsan put on a fashion show, the main theatrical event of the fashion system. A journalist reported that Pipsan herself was the “climax” of the show, donning “an extremely low-backed dress of peacock blue and gold. Her tightly curled auburn hair had been washed and dressed in gold to match the gown.”<sup>55</sup> A similar hairstyle, a silver Marcel-curled wig, appeared on the mannequin dressed in Pipsan’s gown in Eliel’s 1934 “Room for a Lady” displayed at the MMA (figs. 1-2). Metallic wigs were a fashionable evening wear accessory in the late 1920s and

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<sup>52</sup> McNeil, “Designing Women,” 633, 639-40, 648; Penny Sparke, “Interior Decoration and Haute Couture: Links between the Developments of the Two Professions in France and the USA in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries—A Historiographical Analysis,” *Journal of Design History* 21 no. 1 (2008): 104.

<sup>53</sup> “Hostess at Cranbrook Reception,” undated newspaper clipping, “Furniture, Fabrics, Glassware, Lamps and Accessories designed by J. Robert F. Swanson Pipsan S. Swanson, 1928-1965” scrapbook, box 20, folder 1, SP.

<sup>54</sup> “Excerpts from the Kate Thompson Bromley Papers,” undated, np, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, photocopies in the Cranbrook Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Judy O’Grady, “The Colonel’s Lady and Others,” photocopy of undated newspaper clipping in Ashley Brown’s papers, Cranbrook Archives.

early 1930s. Perhaps the most famous example of the trend was when Elsa Schiaparelli, an avant-garde Italian couturiere with an atelier in Paris, wore a tightly curled silver wig in a photograph taken by the surrealist artist Man Ray. The portrait was published in *Town and Country* the year before Pipsan's fashion show where she donned a similar coiffure.<sup>56</sup> Pipsan's penchant for glamour extended into the types of garments she designed: most extant sketches and photographs of her clothing designs from the early 1930s are of evening gowns, the most glamorous of garments.<sup>57</sup>

There is little documentation of what Pipsan's interiors from the 1930s looked like, but at least one was understood at the time as glamorous. The 1936 Mendelssohn redecoration project was described in the *Detroit Free Press* as:

all very rich and very modern, from the library on the second floor, done in soft grays and the halls, with their great mirrors extending from floor to ceiling.... The dining room possibly was the final word Friday night [at the party when Mendelssohn debuted his redecorated wing]. Walls of black and vermillion repeat the color scheme of red chairs and pick up the highlights of the great hunting picture over the fireplace.... For the buffet supper, the table was covered with a cloth of vermillion red, and 14 red candles in a straight row burned in a high holder of modern silver. Matching candelabra in each of the four corners of the room held seven candles.<sup>58</sup>

The modern candelabrum in the dining room was designed by Bob in a geometric style with a satin chrome finish (fig. 3).<sup>59</sup> The "great hunting picture" was painted in a fashionable flattened, schematized, geometric style reminiscent of French *Art Moderne* (fig. 4).<sup>60</sup> The luxury and drama conjured by these details evokes an image similar to the modern interiors depicted in Hollywood films like *Grand Hotel* (1932), *Dinner at Eight* (1933), *The Single Standard* (1929), and *The Kiss* (1929). In

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<sup>56</sup> *Town & Country*, 1 May 1932, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Photographs, "Furniture, Fabrics, Glassware, Lamps and Accessories designed by J. Robert F. Swanson Pipsan S. Swanson, 1928-1965" scrapbook, box 20, folder 1, SP; Photographs of the 1932 exhibition at Kingswood School, image K136-Hance and K140-Hance, CADC; Costume design drawings, CAM 1979.8.A-W, Cranbrook Art Museum.

<sup>58</sup> "Guests View New Painting," *Detroit Free Press*.

<sup>59</sup> Pipsan to Mr. Stalker; Bob designed the candelabrum in January 1935. Candlestick drawing, 15 Jan. 1935, A.D.15.885, Cranbrook Archives.

<sup>60</sup> On *Art Moderne* see Pat Kirkham, Amy F. Ogata, and Catherine L. Whalen, "Europe and North America: 1900-1945," in *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400-2000*, ed. Pat Kirkham and Susan Weber (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Center, 2013), 611-12, 620-21.

these movies, mirrored walls and silver rectilinear furnishings combined to create fractured, scintillating scenes.

Eventually, Pipsan stopped pursuing dressmaking as an occupation and around 1940, she distanced herself from the term “interior decorator.” In the United States Census record from May 1940, she was still described as an interior decorator. But a few months later, Pipsan told a local reporter that she was an interior designer, explaining that interior design was “a relatively new field” that “differs from interior decorating, which is arranging pieces already available, in that the designer actually creates the furniture, rugs, draperies and all furnishings that go to complete a home.”<sup>61</sup> This suggests that Pipsan had come to consider interior decorating and interior designing to be two distinct activities; an interior designer “actually creates” whereas an interior decorator merely placed objects created by other people. By “actually create” Pipsan meant that interior designers designed individual furnishings rather than personally fabricated them. (The only known furnishing designs she fabricated herself were the pillows, lampshades, and curtains she and Loja made for the Saarinen home in 1926, discussed in chapter 1.) Philosopher Christine Battersby has shown that, historically, Western intellectual thought maintained that only men were capable of creating, whereas women could only copy, at best.<sup>62</sup> Pipsan’s conception of interior design elevated the field above the (female) domain of copyists and manipulators, bestowing on to her work a seriousness, respectability, and esteem typically reserved for men’s work.

Pipsan’s definition of an interior designer and her identification with the term reflected the development of her practice. From the late 1920s through the 1930s, she had become increasingly active as a designer of textile furnishings. And in 1940, a month before Pipsan expounded on the difference between interior decorating and interior design, Pipsan had added furniture to her design

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<sup>61</sup> Nellie Hurley Minifie, “Tea for Two,” *Birmingham Eccentric* (MI), 18 July 1940.

<sup>62</sup> See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women’s Press, 1994).

repertoire—her first known foray into furniture design was released in June 1940.<sup>63</sup> Other evidence affirms that Pipsan distanced herself from the designation of “decorator.” By 1941, she had stopped using her old letterhead, which featured “Interior Decorator” typed after her name at the top of plain paper. In place, she started using fine stationery with “Pipsan Saarinen Swanson, Interiors” printed as the header.<sup>64</sup> On all of Pipsan’s curricula vitae, the earliest of which dates to circa 1946, she referred to her work as “Interior Design.”<sup>65</sup>

By the early 1940s, it had also become important for Pipsan to be known as a Saarinen. At birth, her parents named her Eva-Lisa Saarinen and called her Pipsan as a nickname. When she married in 1926, she nominally married out of the Saarinen family by assuming her husband’s last name, per common American practice. Early in her interior decorating career, in the mid-1930s, she routinely used the name “Pipsan S. Swanson” on the letterhead of her business correspondence.<sup>66</sup> Thereafter, Pipsan reincorporated her maiden name back into her identity. By 1942, she had legally changed her name to Pipsan Saarinen Swanson, and by 1941 she used her full name on her work correspondence.<sup>67</sup> Incorporating “Saarinen” into her name was another way that she legitimized her work identity.

### Working wives in the 1930s

At the time Pipsan was developing her career, the numbers of married women in the workforce were increasing.<sup>68</sup> Yet, historians have shown that it was still unusual for a middle-class married woman to work outside the home. In 1930, only 11.7% of married women did so, and by 1940 the

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<sup>63</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>64</sup> Various correspondence from Pipsan, 1936, box 1, folders 8, 9, 15, 16, 19 and box 4, folder 19, 1941, SP.

<sup>65</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1946; Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1951], box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>66</sup> Pipsan’s correspondence, 1930s, box 1, folders 8, 9, 15, 16, and 19, SP.

<sup>67</sup> Pipsan’s United States naturalization certificate, 3 Feb. 1942, box 8, folder 11, SP; Various correspondence from Pipsan, 1936, box 1, folders 8, 9, 15, 16, 19 and box 4, folder 19, 1941, SP.

<sup>68</sup> Wandersee, “Economics of Middle-Income Family Life,” 45.

percentage only rose to 15.3%.<sup>69</sup> Even women who self-identified as modern and independent did not often work after marriage; they usually settled into a life occupied with housework and childcare, leaving it up to their husbands to earn a living.<sup>70</sup> Depression-era social conventions and government policies encouraged middle-class wives to work unpaid in their homes to free up jobs for male breadwinners and single people. Popular opinion maintained that it was only acceptable for women to go to work if their husbands could not earn enough to support the family.<sup>71</sup> Women who worked for pay outside the home were stigmatized as doing so for financial need rather than for choice, pleasure, or a sense of fulfilment. Pipsan's efforts to develop her career, therefore, flouted social conventions at a time of national crisis.

While it is not known if Pipsan began working in the late 1920s for personal reasons or financial reasons or both, when she married Bob and throughout the following decade the Swansons' finances were unstable. In 1926, after their wedding, Bob purchased a large plot of land on a street lined with "lordly country places," with plans to have their home built there.<sup>72</sup> But he was only able to finance what he called their "little castle" by mortgaging the house "to the top."<sup>73</sup> By stretching his means, he expressed that he did not envision his family as residing anywhere below the middle class.

In 1931, the year Bob felt the repercussions of the Depression, and into the next year, Loja twice privately referred to Bob and Pipsan as members of the unemployed masses of the Depression.<sup>74</sup> By 1933, they had recovered to the point that Bob designed an addition for their

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<sup>69</sup> Wandersee, 46.

<sup>70</sup> See chapter 5 of Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 13-17, 27-30.

<sup>72</sup> "Tower Knoll, Bloomfield Hills Michigan: J. Robert F. Swanson," *Architectural Record* 64, no. 1 (July 1928): 49; "Tower Knoll," *Afterglow* (MI), Dec. 1927, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 11 June 1926, box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob to Pipsan, 5 June [1926], box 8, folder 3, SP.

<sup>74</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Loja to Johannes Öhqvist, Hvitträsk groundskeeper, 20 Nov. 1931 and 24 Jan. 1932, CJO.



home.<sup>75</sup> Several years later, in 1936 and into early 1937, the Swansons had a very profitable run with the spike in Pipsan's interior decorating work. The Swansons' net income from this period put them in the wealthiest 2.7% of the population.<sup>76</sup> Pipsan alone, through her decorator's fee, netted at least \$7,794.<sup>77</sup> This was well above the median family income, which was \$1,160 in 1936; in that year, half of American families earned between \$500 and \$1,500 per year.<sup>78</sup> 1936 to 1937 was, however, a particularly good stretch for the Swansons—in this period Pipsan had two extraordinarily high-ticket Mendelssohn jobs. At other times, such as in 1938, Bob felt “broke” for months on end.<sup>79</sup> As the primary breadwinner, Bob was responsible for securing their finances. He coped with the strained periods by taking out a second mortgage on their home, forfeiting a summer trip to Hvitträsk to stay home and work, letting bills pile up, and borrowing money from Pipsan's parents.<sup>80</sup>

It is not known how, in so little time, the Swansons sunk from the wealthiest 2.7% of the population to struggling with bills. Being “broke as hell,” as Bob once privately described his situation to Pipsan, meant different things to different people.<sup>81</sup> During the Depression, many middle- and upper-middle-class people chose to borrow money, leave bills unpaid, or take other measures like buying on instalment or sending an additional family member such as a wife or older son out to work in order to maintain their standard of living.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the Swansons were not in the same predicament as the masses of unemployed Americans living in poverty, evidenced by the fact that their monthly bills in the mid-1930s totalled \$400.<sup>83</sup> According to a 1935 government study, a

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<sup>75</sup> Bob, architectural drawings the Swanson home, 21, 27, and 28 March 1933, A.D.15.862-4, Cranbrook Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Architecture and interior decorating statements, 1936-1937, box 1, folders 13, 15, 16, 20, SP; Wandersee, “Economics of Middle-Income Family Life,” 47, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Decorating statements, 1936-Jan. 1937, box 1, folders 13, 15, 16, 20, SP.

<sup>78</sup> Wandersee, “Economics of Middle-Income Family Life,” 47, 48.

<sup>79</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 2 June [1938], box 8, folder 3, SP.

<sup>80</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 12 July [1934], box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob to Pipsan, 31 July [1934], box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob to Pipsan, 10 Aug. 1938, box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob to Pipsan, 17 Aug. 1938 box 8, folder 3, SP.

<sup>81</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 20 Aug. [year unknown], box 8, folder 3, SP.

<sup>82</sup> Wandersee, “Economics of Middle-Income Family Life,” 49-55; Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 153-59.

<sup>83</sup> Bob to Pipsan, 12 July [1934].

family of four could get by (above an “emergency” level) on just \$31.34 a month for housing and household operation.<sup>84</sup> The Swansons’ bills covered far more than bare necessities, including up to two domestic workers to cook, clean, and help with childcare.<sup>85</sup> By 1949, and possibly much earlier, at least one of the Swansons’ domestic workers lived in their home.<sup>86</sup> Although full-time domestic workers were becoming less common, wealthy families such as Bob’s architecture clients, as well as the Saarinens, still employed live-in service in the 1930s.<sup>87</sup>

If Pipsan did work for financial reasons, it was so the Swansons could maintain their comfortable lifestyle and demonstrate that they were of similar exceptional social status as the Saarinens, rather than to keep a roof over their head. If they could maintain an outward appearance of financial stability, Pipsan would have looked like an especially modern woman who *chose* to flout social conventions, and that pay was more incidental than the driving motive, which would have indicated a failure on Bob’s part to provide for his family. A professional image for Pipsan could also have helped compensate for the undignified nature of the Swansons’ financial instability since a professional was more respectable and typically of a higher social class than other types of workers.

## Conclusion

Most, if not all, of Pipsan’s paid work from the late 1920s until the late 1930s was secured with the help of the men in her life. Pipsan’s position as Eliel’s daughter, which helped her secure

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<sup>84</sup> Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending*, 155-57.

<sup>85</sup> Loja to Johannes Öhqvist, Hvitträsk groundskeeper, 28 Dec. 1932, CJO; Correspondence from Bob to Pipsan, 1930s, box 8, folder 3, SP; Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022. Bob Jr., who was born in 1928, remembers having someone live in his family’s home who cooked, cleaned, and sometimes babysat him when he was a child.

<sup>86</sup> Bob’s architectural drawings of the Swanson residence, 1926-1949, Cranbrook Archives; When the Swansons’ built their house in 1926, there was not a maid’s room, but there was by 1949. The maid’s room may have been added in a 1933 addition.

<sup>87</sup> Marsha Miro, “A House Ahead of Its Time,” *Detroit Free Press*, 21 Jan. 1982. According to one of the Swansons clients from the late 1930s, who lived in another elite suburb of Detroit, everyone in their neighborhood had live-in service. The Saarinens had live-in domestic service in Finland and Michigan. House plans published in *Architectural Forum* in the 1930s often included maid’s rooms. See also Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 5; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife between the Wars,” in *Decades of Discontent*, 3.

opportunities discussed in chapter 1, only took her so far. It brought her prestige (in certain design circles), experience, and connections, but it led only to unpaid opportunities (e.g., exhibitions) or short-lived jobs. It did not guarantee her a regular source of income, which Pipsan needed after marrying into financial strain that was compounded by the Depression. Any money she brought in helped her family live a lifestyle resembling the one she grew up with. When she began working as an interior decorator, which could be very lucrative, she initially secured work through Bob by designing the interiors of homes he designed. He also helped her establish accounts with manufacturers so she could have access to what little wholesale material existed on the market in the modern style she sought.

Beyond Pipsan's business obstacles, it was challenging for middle-class women to work for pay in the 1930s while maintaining a sense of propriety. Like other middle-class women who had done so gracefully, Pipsan initially worked for pay in areas that were gendered as female or were associated with women—interiors and dress. In these areas, she had ample prominent female role models.

By the second half of the 1930s, Pipsan had stopped pursuing dressmaking to focus on interior and, increasingly, furnishings design. Perhaps this was just where the opportunities arose: the spike in her interiors work around 1936 pulled her away from dressmaking. According to her son and granddaughter, Pipsan loved designing and making clothes and did so for herself into the 1970s.<sup>88</sup> However, dressmaking was work that Pipsan did independently of Bob. Whereas with her interior decorating work, which came to involve textile and furniture design, she worked closely with him. Because she was long accustomed to working with or alongside family members on design projects, she may have wanted to develop a career that overlapped with her husband's work. Interior

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<sup>88</sup> Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022; Karen Swanson, interview by the author, 25 July 2017; Photograph of Pipsan knitting, June 1961, box 10, folder 5, SP; Eleanor Breitmeyer, "Hairdos Turn Fancy for Cranbrook Gala," *Detroit News*, 8 Nov. 1967.

and furnishings design could also be conceived as a way that Pipsan supported her husband's career since the work was done to complete buildings he designed. By the late 1930s, Pipsan's interior decorating practice had developed to the point that she executed some commissions for interiors of architecture that Bob did not design, but most of her interior design work over the course of her career, into the 1970s, would be for Bob's buildings.<sup>89</sup>

In the 1930s, in terms of Pipsan's career development, interior and furnishings design were more natural bedfellows than interior design and dressmaking because her interiors work required her to procure furnishings, which proved to be a lot of work. From the outset, her decorating jobs involved commissioning custom-made textiles, and by the mid-1930s Pipsan was seeking out custom furniture as well. After initiating relationships with manufacturers by buying their catalogue products, she started dabbling in designing for factory production herself in effort to achieve the results she desired. Pipsan's interior decorating work drew her into furnishings design.

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<sup>89</sup> For example, the Graham residence (1938-1939) and Holtzman residence (1940-1941), box 10, folders 14 and 23, SAR; Lilian Jackson Braun, "The Nation's Architects Honor Mrs. Swanson," *Detroit Free Press*, 19 April 1971.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. "Room for a Lady," designed by Eliel, displayed at the *Contemporary American Industrial Art* exhibition, 1934, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York (Friedman, *Making America Modern*, 114). Pipsan designed the dress.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 2. Closeup of dress designed by Pipsan for the *Contemporary American Industrial Art* exhibition (see figure 1), displayed at the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, 1935, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)



Figure 3. Candelabrum, designed by Bob, 1935 (Sotheby's website). The candelabrum was used in Gordon Mendelssohn's residence in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, decorated by Pipsan in 1936.

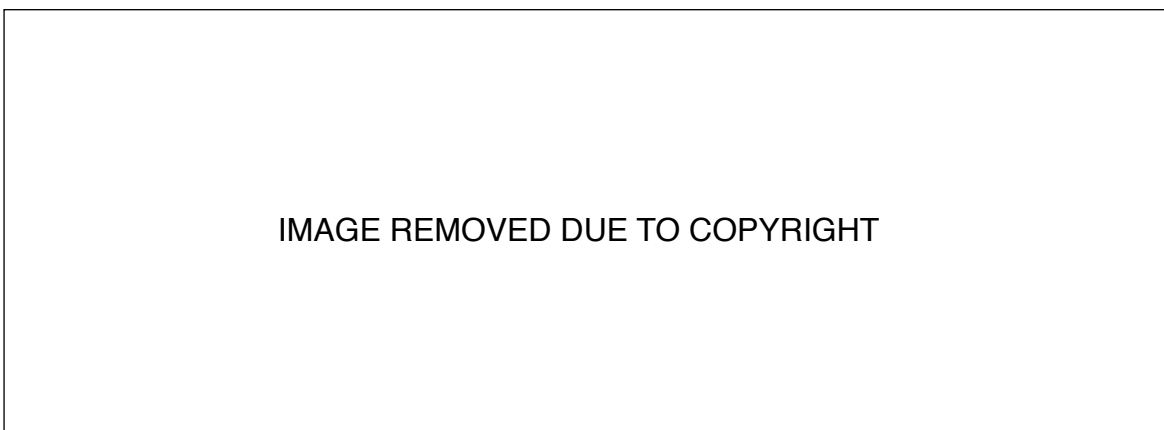


Figure 4. Painting by Zoltan Sepeshy (Sotheby's website). The painting hung in Gordon Mendelssohn's residence in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, decorated by Pipsan in 1936.

**PART II: Flexible Home Arrangements (released 1940)**

### Chapter 3: Multipurpose-Modular Wood Furniture

According to Pipsan, for her early interiors, “almost everything had to be especially designed and custom made, as contemporary pieces of furniture, fabrics and accessories were hard to find. That, naturally, made everything quite expensive, so [I and my husband] decided to do something about it.”<sup>1</sup> By 1938, she, Bob, and Eliel had begun working on a line of “functional and flexible” modern wood home furniture to be used in Pipsan’s interiors and sold on the open market.<sup>2</sup> Released in 1940, Flexible Home Arrangements was the first line of mass-produced home furnishings with which Pipsan was involved in designing and it was her first known foray into furniture design (figs. 1-18). The line developed out of her earlier interior design work and also related to Bob’s and Eliel’s previous work. Each designer contributed knowledge and/or connections necessary to get the line designed, manufactured, and marketed. The line provided Pipsan with a large palette of furniture to use in her interior design work and created an additional source of income for her family. Pipsan’s role, however, was diminished in the publicity.

#### Eliel’s involvement

Because Pipsan and Bob had been collaborating on residential design for almost a decade by the late 1930s, and because both had begun dabbling in home furnishings design, it makes sense that they worked together on Flexible Home Arrangements. It is not known why Eliel became involved in a line of mass-produced furniture that arose out of Pipsan’s interior design work, nor is it known how the labour was divided between the three designers. A collaboration may have transpired from working near each other; in the years the line was developed, Bob and Pipsan worked in the same

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<sup>1</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>2</sup> Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; W. & J. Sloane, *Flexible Home Arrangements* (New York: W. & J. Sloane, undated [by 25 July 1941]), unpaginated booklet (hereafter cited as Sloane booklet).



architecture office as Eliel as well as Eero.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the press and advertisements for Flexible Home Arrangements credited Eliel as either the sole or the head designer, with the majority attributing exclusive design credit to him.<sup>4</sup> The Swansons, however, saw things differently and on two occasions, Bob requested that he and Pipsan be credited as co-designers along with Eliel. In a letter to *Interiors*, after correcting the impression that the line was designed only by Eliel, Bob explained that in fact he and Pipsan “did most of the designing of this furniture and have the most contact with the Johnson Furniture Company on it.”<sup>5</sup> Pipsan eventually wanted the project to be known as the work of herself and her husband. While her resumé from around 1946 listed Eliel as a co-designer, on Pipsan’s later curricula vitae, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, she wrote that she had designed the line with her husband, without mentioning her father’s name.<sup>6</sup>

Eliel’s motives for designing such a line are not as obvious as the Swansons’. While Flexible Home Arrangements was in development, from around 1938 until 1940, Eliel was occupied at Cranbrook with his roles as educator and campus architect, on top of a steady flow of off-campus architectural work.<sup>7</sup> Eliel also did not have the same financial pressures as the Swansons, given that he had a salary from Cranbrook, with supplemental income from his other architectural work. Furthermore, Flexible Home Arrangements was an unusual project for Eliel to take on. Over his long career, most of his work had focused on architectural commissions and custom furnishings for

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<sup>3</sup> Bob, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 7 Feb. 1980, box 4, tape 203, COHI.

<sup>4</sup> Charles M. Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern,” *New York Sun*, 29 June 1940; John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 99, no. 12 (July 1940) 5; C. John Marsman, “Contemporary Marches On,” *Interiors* 100, no.4 (Nov. 1940): 18-19; W. & J. Sloane advertisement, *Los Angeles Sun*, 24 Nov. 1940; Walter Rendell Storey, “Home Decoration: Brighter Colors for the Dining Room: Table Linen,” *New York Times*; 29 June 1941; “Interiors: Furniture Picture for 1941,” *Interiors* 100, no. 7 (Feb. 1941): 17; Wilson-Jump Co. advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 Jan. 1942; Ford and Ford, *Design of Modern Interiors*, 113; “Today’s Modern Furniture,” *Interiors* 101, no. 10 (May 1942): 34-35; John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 103, no. 9 (April 1944): 20; John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 103, no. 11 (June 1944): 24; Marion Gough, “We Do These Things Better Now,” *House Beautiful*, Dec. 1946, 209.

<sup>5</sup> Bob to Gladys Wells Lawrence, Associate Editor, *Interiors*, 27 May 1941, box 9, folder 13, SP; Bob’s note on letter from John Stuart, Inc. to Bob, 13 June 1941, box 9 folder 3, SP.

<sup>6</sup> Pipsan curricula vitae, undated [circa 1946], ca. 1948, 17 Oct. 1969, and ca. 1971, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>7</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 137-39.

them. In the United States, he worked on very few single-family homes.<sup>8</sup> He therefore did not have the same obvious reasons to design a line of affordable, flexible home furnishings as Pipsan and Bob, who had been pursuing residential design work since 1929.

Nor did Eliel engage very heavily in mass production at any point in his career. The collaboration with International Silver, which began in 1929 and continued through 1937, was his only other known job designing for mass production in the United States.<sup>9</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, the International Silver collaboration was managed by Bob, the Swansons benefitted financially from it, and the company was interested in Eliel's name as well as his design skills. In advertisements, International Silver promoted Eliel as the "eminent" and "famed architect."<sup>10</sup> By the late 1930s, Bob was aware of the value of his father-in-law's name. For a furniture line intended to be sold on the market, to credit Eliel as a designer was a strong selling point. While Eliel was a world-renowned architect, Pipsan and Bob were relatively unknown outside of Detroit. For his part, Eliel may have agreed to become involved in the project to help his daughter jumpstart a career in furniture design and/or help her better execute her interior design work.

### Transferable knowledge

Of the three designers, Eliel by far had the most experience in furniture design. He had designed custom furniture for his buildings since the late 1890s.<sup>11</sup> When he started out doing so, he worked closely with the artisans who fabricated his designs for furniture and other furnishings. Probably because Eliel lacked training and practical experience in handcrafts, he considered these early

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<sup>8</sup> Christ-Janer, 90, 92, 136-41; Wittkopp, *Saarinens House*, 31-34, 44, 131.

<sup>9</sup> Christ-Janer's monograph on Eliel mentions the International Silver work but not Flexible Home Arrangements. Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 108, 129.

<sup>10</sup> International Silver advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, Oct. 1930, 136; International Silver advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, Nov. 1930, 216; International Silver advertisement, *Harper's Bazaar*, Oct. 1929, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Hausen, "The Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 41-42.

collaborations his “most valuable schooling.”<sup>12</sup> On at least one occasion around 1908, Eliel designed wood furniture for serial production by the Finnish manufacturer N. Boman’s Joinery. This company had previously fabricated custom furniture for his interiors, yet little else is known about this work.<sup>13</sup>

In the United States, he did not design mass-produced furniture prior to Flexible Home Arrangements, but he did have experience working with high-end manufacturers that also fabricated custom pieces. Most furniture factories in the United States in the interwar period employed highly skilled craftsmen to serially produce traditional cabinetry.<sup>14</sup> Eliel’s understanding of such craft techniques, therefore, would have helped him work with American manufacturers. W. & J. Sloane, a high-end furnishings manufacturer and retail store headquartered in New York, had fabricated Eliel’s custom furniture designs for his home at Cranbrook (constructed 1929-1930) as well as the 1929 model dining room he exhibited at the MMA.<sup>15</sup> W. & J. Sloane later marketed and retailed Flexible Home Arrangements. For Eliel’s 1934 “Room for a Lady,” displayed at the MMA, the furniture was fabricated in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by the Robert W. Irwin Company, known for producing high-quality veneered furniture in historicist and modern styles.<sup>16</sup> Grand Rapids was a major furniture manufacturing centre, specializing in mid- and high-quality cabinetmaking, located some 160 miles from Detroit. Given Eliel’s ample experience in furniture design, as well as his connections with high-end manufacturers and retailers, perhaps for Flexible Home Arrangements he acted like a consultant or mentor to Pipsan and Bob on their first venture into territory they were both less familiar with.

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<sup>12</sup> Amberg, *Saarinens Interior Design*, 39; Eliel quoted in Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Amberg, *Saarinens Interior Design*, 37; Amberg, “Catalogue of Works,” 241-43.

<sup>14</sup> Christian G. Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture: The Story of America’s Furniture City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Public Museum of Grand Rapids, 1998), 81; George Nelson, “The Furniture Industry: Its Geography, Its Anatomy, Its Physiognomy, Its Products,” *Fortune*, Jan. 1947, 107, 172.

<sup>15</sup> Wittkopp, *Saarinens House*, 34; W. & J. Sloane, *The Story of Sloane’s* (New York: W. & J. Sloane, 1950), 27-31.

<sup>16</sup> Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture*, 64, 169.

Although nowhere near as seasoned a furniture designer as Eliel, Bob had knowledge to contribute to the design team. He was the only Flexible Home Arrangements designer to have practical experience in cabinetmaking. In the early 1930s, when he was struggling to secure architectural work, he assisted Tor Berglund, the Swedish cabinetmaker at Cranbrook who fabricated many of Eliel's designs for the Saarinen residence.<sup>17</sup> Bob also may have had cabinetmaking experience prior to that.<sup>18</sup>

Pipsan is not known to have had any practical experience in woodworking. She likely did not see this as a hindrance, though, since her father did not have handcraft experience either, and he had found success designing wood furniture nonetheless. It would not have occurred to any of the designers that they lacked necessary formal training in mass-produced furniture design since the first programs in mass-production design in the United States were recently established. Cranbrook was, in fact, at the forefront of the movement to develop higher education in design for mass-production.<sup>19</sup> In the 1930s, the most renowned modern furniture designers in the United States had trained as architects, advertising illustrators (e.g., Gilbert Rohde), or theatre designers (e.g., Russel Wright).<sup>20</sup>

Pipsan had gained knowledge on furniture construction through her many years working as an interior decorator. The custom furniture used in her 1936 to 1937 interiors, discussed in chapter 2, were made by a variety of local craftspeople: a general building contractor; an antique furniture dealer who also fabricated "special furniture" and provided upholstery and repair services; an independent upholsterer; and a "painters and decorators" company that finished and painted wood

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<sup>17</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Miller, "Interior Design and Furniture," 94.

<sup>18</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>19</sup> Margolin, *World History of Design: World War I to World War II*, 419-24.

<sup>20</sup> See Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

surfaces.<sup>21</sup> Some pieces required the combined efforts of multiple craftspeople. For example, a custom cabinet in the Calingaert residence, designed from 1936 to 1937, required the work of three different parties (fig. 19). A general building contractor made part of the cabinet, probably the carcass. The antique furniture dealer worked on the cabinet, probably by veneering the piece since antique furniture was oftentimes veneered. The last party that worked on the cabinet was a company of “painters and decorators,” who Pipsan often used to paint and finish surfaces in her interiors; this company finished the piece, possibly by applying a stain or protective coating. Other pieces Pipsan commissioned for her decorating jobs required different labour. A small end table/chest in the main bedroom of the Calingaert residence was made by the antique furniture dealer alone (fig. 20). A built-in sofa in the bedroom was made by a building contractor and a local upholsterer (fig. 21).<sup>22</sup> Pieces Pipsan purchased from manufacturers for the Calingaert home and other residences still required outside craftspeople for upholstering and finishing. For example, an easy chair in the Calingaert residence was purchased from Herman Miller but was upholstered by a third party (fig. 20).<sup>23</sup> According to common interior decorating practice, for these and other furnishings, Pipsan would have coordinated and overseen the execution of each step.<sup>24</sup> If Pipsan worked in an atypical manner and Bob was involved in this work, she still would have been privy to the process and progress of furniture made for her interior design jobs.

Working as an interior decorator provided Pipsan with other useful knowledge for

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<sup>21</sup> Correspondence and accounting books, Calingaert residence, box 1, folders 15-16, SP; The antique furniture dealer was Valentine Brotz Sons, Inc. Joseph Brotz to Bob, 19 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP. See also *History of Wayne County and the city of Detroit, Michigan*, vol. 4, eds. Clarence M. Burton and M. Agnes Burton (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1930), 485-86; The independent upholsterer was Morris S. Coleman from Pontiac, Michigan. Pipsan or Bob to Morris Coleman, 19 Aug. 1936, box 1, folder 15, SP. Coleman is listed in the 1930 and 1940 census records as an upholsterer.

<sup>22</sup> Calingaert accounting books, undated [1936-1937], box 1, folder 16, SP; Harold Broock, General Building Contractor and Engineer, to Bob, 13 July 1936, box 1, folder 15; SP; Hugo Rolland invoice, 23 Sept. 1936, box 1, folder 15, SP.

<sup>23</sup> Calingaert accounting books; Pipsan to Herman Miller Furniture Company, 16 Sept. 1936, box 1, folder 15, SP. The Herman Miller chair was sent to Louis Passarell, who is listed on the 1940 Census as an upholsterer who owned his own shop.

<sup>24</sup> See Introduction.

developing Flexible Home Arrangements. By sourcing catalogue furnishings for clients, she made contacts with manufacturers in Grand Rapids, including Johnson, the company that would eventually produce Flexible Home Arrangements.<sup>25</sup> These contacts helped her gain insight into possible candidates to produce a line she co-designed and initiate discussions regarding a possible collaboration. Additionally, by requesting customized versions of catalogue items from manufacturers, she learned about the possibilities, limitations, and costs of factory-made furniture. Her frustrating search for suitable modern furniture, moreover, armed her with valuable market research to inform the design of Flexible Home Arrangements by pointing out how little of such furniture was on the market and revealing their closest competitors.

After the Swansons decided to design their own line of furniture, it took them “several years” to secure a manufacturer to produce it.<sup>26</sup> The late 1930s was a challenging time to develop a modern line of furniture, due to low consumer demand within a depressed economy. After the worst Depression years in the early 1930s, the economy saw a modest improvement in the middle of the decade, but took another dive in 1937 to 1938—around the time Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel began working on Flexible Home Arrangements.<sup>27</sup> Over the course of the decade, one third of furniture companies in Grand Rapids closed.<sup>28</sup> The furniture industry there was best known for historicist styles, but since the mid-1920s select companies, including Johnson, had dabbled in modern design.<sup>29</sup> Modern styles, however, had thus far proved to have a limited customer base.<sup>30</sup> Despite the

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<sup>25</sup> Jickling residence Interior Decorating Statement, 24 Oct. 1929, box 10, folder 24, SAR; “Mendelssohn Interior,” undated [ca. 1929], box 1, folder 5, SP.

<sup>26</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 350-61.

<sup>28</sup> Carron, *Grand Rapids Furniture*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> Carron, 84-87. In 1928, Johnson Furniture Co. released a line called Dynamique Creations, inspired by French *Art Moderne*, designed by David Bobson Smith. The line was developed through 1935.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Linable Modernism*, 8-10; Lindsay Stamm Shapiro, “A Man and His Manners: Resetting the American Table,” in *Russel Wright*, eds. Albrecht, Schonfeld, and Shapiro, 31; “Current Furniture Styles,” *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 86, no. 5 (15 May 1931): 138; “Furniture Style Forecast,” *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 93, no. 6 (Dec. 1934-Jan. 1935): 29-30; Nelson, “The Furniture Industry,” 178.

unstable economy and questionable consumer demand, Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel managed to coax Johnson into taking a risk and produce a line of modern furniture according to their design.<sup>31</sup>

#### From custom made to mass-production

Debuting in June 1940 at the Grand Rapids Summer Furniture Market, the full line of Flexible Home Arrangements consisted of approximately fifty pieces: seven chests, eight cabinets, five bookshelves, sixteen tables, four pieces of seating furniture, two mirrors, two desks, three beds, two plant stands, a bar buffet, a radio cabinet, and a shelf (figs. 1-18).<sup>32</sup> The seating furniture was made of solid maple and the case furniture was made of birch veneer with dark walnut bases. Some pieces had metal details, in the forms of aluminium tabs on the drawer and cabinet pulls and optional metal tabletops (fig. 4, 15-16). Many pieces were designed to serve more than one function, such as a desk that could also be used as a vanity (fig. 5). Intended to be used in any room in the home, except the kitchen or the bath, the line included twenty-three modular case pieces (called “unit” or “sectional” furniture at the time), all thirty inches tall so they could be set next to each other to create the seamless appearance of a larger piece of furniture (figs. 2-12). Several of these modular pieces could be stacked on top of each other (fig. 9). Individual case units could also be used on their own. For example, a single chest could be used as a nightstand, side table, or dresser (fig. 8).<sup>33</sup> Or two could be connected with a shelf to form a vanity (fig. 6). To suggest the look of custom built-in furniture, the top panels extended back about 1/2” to form a small cantilever so the tops met the wall. This allowed room for base boards that otherwise would have prohibited the back panels from butting flush with the wall.

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<sup>31</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP; Bob to Barry Stuart, Executive, Johnson Furniture Co., 11 July 1940, box 12, folder 7, SAR.

<sup>32</sup> Sloane booklet; Christine Holbrook, “Here’s a Furniture Adventure,” *Better Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1940, 32-33, 99; Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 31 July 1940, box 2, folder 8, SP.

<sup>33</sup> Sloane booklet.

The design of Flexible Home Arrangements was influenced by interiors Pipsan had decorated in the preceding decade. In them, she demonstrated an interest in furniture that was built in or perfectly fitted a space. As discussed in chapter 2, she tried to get Heywood-Wakefield to make a chair in a custom size so that eighteen could be placed next to each other in a modular fashion to form a continuing bench that precisely fitted a wall. Some of the custom pieces for the Calingaert residence were also designed to perfectly fit a space or were built into the architecture (figs. 19, 21, 22, 24).

The Calingaert home is the only residence Pipsan decorated prior to the release of Flexible Home Arrangements for which photographs exist. Many of the custom pieces in the home were a similar style as Flexible Home Arrangements furniture. In both the Calingaert residence and in the furniture line, the cabinets, bookcases, beds, benches, tables, and desk were relatively simple, comprising both rectilinear and curving forms, and featuring ample light-coloured natural woodgrain with occasional metal accents (figs. 19-26). Case furniture in the Calingaert residence and in the Flexible Home Arrangements line both had long rectangular pulls and square pulls (figs. 3, 9, 19, 20). The Calingaert dining-room cabinet especially resembled Flexible Home Arrangements modular cabinet units (figs. 2, 19). Another Flexible Home Arrangements item that related to Pipsan's earlier interiors was the set of nesting tables, offered with a metal or wood top (fig. 15). In 1936, Pipsan had approached American manufacturers and a distributor of Swedish furniture in search of a "modern" set of nesting tables, on one occasion specifically requesting a set with a metal top.<sup>34</sup> The next year, in the Calingaert residence, Pipsan used a set of nesting tables with a metal top similar to the Flexible Home Arrangements set (fig. 23).<sup>35</sup>

Several pieces of Flexible Home Arrangements furniture can also be traced to Bob's earlier

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<sup>34</sup> Widdicomb Furniture Co. to Pipsan, 5 Feb. 1936, box 1, folder 19, SP; Pipsan to Hekman Furniture Co., 1 Dec. 1936, box 1, folder 20, SP; Correspondence between Pipsan and Sweden House, 2 and 6 Nov. 1936, box 1, folder 20, SP.

<sup>35</sup> "Decorating Account," 3 March 1937, box 1, folder 16, SP.



work. After he assisted the Cranbrook cabinetmaker Tor Berglund in the early 1930s, Bob went on to design several pieces of custom furniture, which he exhibited at Cranbrook in 1935, as discussed in chapter 1 (fig. 27). Simplified versions of three of these designs were subsequently included in the Flexible Home Arrangements line (figs. 16-18).

Flexible Home Arrangements solved more than one of the Swansons' problems. The fifty-piece collection gave Pipsan a large palette of furniture in the style she desired to use in her interiors. She was able to further customize the pieces to suit the style and size of a given room by requesting Johnson to make items with non-standard dimensions, special finishes, and custom hardware in place of the standard pulls.<sup>36</sup>

Using products from the Flexible Home Arrangements line also reduced costs for her interiors. For example, the cabinet custom made for the Calingaert dining room had cost Pipsan \$122.36 (fig. 19).<sup>37</sup> A similar effect could have been achieved with Flexible Home Arrangements by placing three 48" x 20" x 30" modular cabinet units next to each other (fig. 7). Such an assemblage would have cost Pipsan \$75, which was 38% less than the custom version.<sup>38</sup> Other Flexible Home Arrangement pieces were an even greater savings compared to earlier custom-made equivalents. To make the custom end table/chest discussed above, the antique furniture dealer had charged Pipsan \$65 (fig. 20).<sup>39</sup> The closest Flexible Home Arrangements piece, which was slightly different in design, with one more drawer and more complicated pulls than the custom piece, cost Pipsan \$13.50—80% less than the custom chest (fig. 8).<sup>40</sup> The same antique dealer also made a custom table with a

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see Johnson Furniture Co. invoices, 1940-1941, box 2, folder 8, SP; box 3, folder 1, SP; and box 11, folder 16, SAR. See also Bob to Lawrence.

<sup>37</sup> Calingaert accounting books.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 24 Oct. 1941, box 12, folder 12, SAR. The price Pipsan paid Johnson Furniture Co. for these cabinets was 45% less than the retail price, which was \$135. Mayer & Co. advertisement, *Sunday Star* (Washington DC), 3 Nov. 1940.

<sup>39</sup> Calingaert accounting books.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 31 July 1940, box 2, folder 8, SP. The price Pipsan paid Johnson Furniture Co. for the piece was 55% less than the retail price, which was \$29.75. Mayer & Co. advertisement.

stainless steel tabletop, possibly similar to one of two coffee tables in the Flexible Home Arrangements line (fig. 16).<sup>41</sup> The custom one cost Pipsan \$75 while two Flexible Home Arrangements tables in custom woods with metal tops cost her \$17 and \$20, respectively—both about 75% less than the custom-made piece.<sup>42</sup>

When Pipsan used Flexible Home Arrangements pieces in clients' homes, she varied the markup of her prices, but the price she charged her client was routinely less than the retail price. On clients' invoices, Pipsan indicated the percentage the pieces were discounted off the retail price.<sup>43</sup> Such a deal on a new line of modern furniture might have incentivized local Michiganders to hire her to decorate their homes. Bringing Pipsan's interior design costs down might also have expanded her client base to encompass a slightly lower socio-economic group. Flexible Home Arrangements, therefore, might have helped Pipsan develop her interior design career. Because the line was sold to the public, it also helped the Swanson's financially by bringing in a steady flow of income, which would have been particularly welcome because the years leading up to the release of the line were financially precarious times for the Swansons.<sup>44</sup>

Flexible Home Arrangements also made Pipsan's interior design work more efficient. Commissioning, coordinating, and overseeing custom-made furniture had demanded time, as did purchasing certain catalogue items from manufacturers because Pipsan sometimes had these pieces upholstered or refinished by local craftspeople.<sup>45</sup> Certainly a great deal of work went into developing Flexible Home Arrangements, but once the line sheets were set, and Pipsan had the fifty pieces to choose from, it was much easier for her to obtain furniture for interiors. She just ordered the

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph Brotz to Bob, 19 March 1936, box 1, folder 8, SP.

<sup>42</sup> Brotz to Bob; Johnson Furniture Co. invoices, 31 July and 7 Aug. 1940, box 2, folder 9, SP.

<sup>43</sup> Decorating invoices, box 2, folders 8, 9, 11, SP, box 4, folder 19, SAR, box 10, folders 15-16, SAR; Holbrook, "Furniture Adventure," 99; Mayer & Co. advertisements, *Sunday Star* (Washington, DC), 3 Nov. 1940, 12 Jan. 1941, and 15 Jan. 1941.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>45</sup> Calingaert accounting books.

products she wanted from Johnson, made any special requests, like custom hardware or special wood finishes, sent them any special upholstery fabric, and Johnson saw the items through to completion.<sup>46</sup>

From 1940 until at least 1944, Flexible Home Arrangements was sold to interior decorators through John Stuart, Inc. a furniture wholesaler in New York.<sup>47</sup> The company exhibited a model room of Flexible Home Arrangements at the Rockefeller Home Center in a display that was open to the public for one year starting in June 1941.<sup>48</sup> The public could purchase the line from high-end stores known for their distinguished furniture departments, such as W. & J. Sloane in New York and Beverly Hills, Marshall Field in Chicago, Paul Schutte in Cincinnati, Boutells in Minneapolis, Mayer & Co. in Washington DC, and Stewart's in Louisville.<sup>49</sup> The line received excellent press coverage, with feature articles in *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes & Gardens*.<sup>50</sup> Flexible Home Arrangements was also published in *House & Garden*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Interiors* and the 1942 book *Design of Modern Interiors* by James Ford and Katherine Morrow Ford, influential writers on housing design.<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly one of the reasons design critics, editors, and possibly buyers took notice of the line was because the renowned architect Eliel Saarinen was one of its designers.

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<sup>46</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 31 July 1940, box 2, folder 8, SP; Pipsan to Barry Stuart, Executive, Johnson Furniture Co., 20 Dec. 1940, box 10, folder 15, SAR; Stapler Fabrics invoice, 4 Feb. 1941, box 10, folder 15, SAR.

<sup>47</sup> John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 99, no. 12 (July 1940): 5; John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 103, no. 11 (June 1944): 24.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Rendell Storey, "Home Decoration: Brighter Colors for the Dining Room," *New York Times*, 29 June 1941; John Stuart, Inc. to Bob.

<sup>49</sup> W. & J. Sloane advertisement, *Los Angeles Sun*, 24 Nov. 1940; "Featuring Informal Modern," *House & Garden*, May 1941, 33; Paul Schutte advertisement, *Cincinnati Enquirer* (OH), 18 Jan. 1942; Boutells advertisement, *Minneapolis Star* (MN), 26 Jan. 1941; Mayer & Co. advertisement; Stewart's advertisement, *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), 8 Oct. 1943.

<sup>50</sup> Holbrook, "Furniture Adventure"; "Coordination Perfect," *House Beautiful*, Sept. 1940, 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> Ford and Ford, *Design of Modern Interiors*, 113. This book was printed eight times in the ten years after it was published; "Today's Modern Furniture," 34-35; "Featuring Informal Modern"; "How to Make a Little House Look Bigger!" *Good Housekeeping*, July 1941, 120-21.

## From the Saarinen residence to Flexible Home Arrangements

If Eliel was not the main designer of Flexible Home Arrangements as the Swansons claimed, he nonetheless influenced the design of the line. Some pieces related to earlier projects headed by him, such as the Saarinen residence at Cranbrook, for which Eliel designed the architecture and most of the custom-made, handcrafted furniture.<sup>52</sup> The cabinet and armchairs in the living room, the couches in the living room and studio alcove, and the credenza in the studio all comprised block-like forms reminiscent of Flexible Home Arrangements case units (figs. 28-31). The mass-produced case units were especially similar to Eliel's home desk, with its simple boxy form, smooth surfaces, platform base, light-coloured wood, and simple, horizontal, metallic drawer pulls (fig. 32).<sup>53</sup> The desk also had the same single curved edge as the Flexible Home Arrangements desk/vanity (fig. 5). The pulls were the biggest difference between Eliel's home desk and the mass-produced case furniture. The Flexible Home Arrangements pulls were attached with two standard screws and washers, allowing Pipsan to have Johnson swap them for custom hardware, as she did on several occasions in order to alter the style of the furniture to suit specific interiors.<sup>54</sup>

Certain Flexible Home Arrangements pieces were modelled on specific pieces in the Saarinen residence, with adjustments made to simplify the forms and eliminate costly decorative details. Both a Flexible Home Arrangements dining table and the one in the Saarinen residence were circular with arc-shaped extension pieces that increased the table size while maintaining its circular shape (figs. 1, 33). Both tables had bases resembling fluted columns, but the Flexible Home Arrangements base had a simpler construction and the tabletop had a simpler veneer arrangement. Another piece in the Flexible Home Arrangements line, the square card table that was similar to one

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<sup>52</sup> Wittkopp, *Saarinen House*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Wittkopp attributes the design of the desk to Eliel or Eero. He believes that the curved element was Eero's influence. Wittkopp, *Saarinen House*, 110; Wittkopp, Zoom discussion, 21 March 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoices, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 8, SP; Photographs, Eden residence, box 11, folder 3, SP.

that Bob designed in the mid-1930s (discussed above), had an even earlier precedent in one designed by Eliel for his home (figs. 18, 27, 30). The Flexible Home Arrangements table had the same subtle ledge circumscribing the top as the two earlier tables, but with simpler veneer arrangements, and without the step design on the inside of the legs on the Saarinen residence table.

The connection between Eliel's interiors and Flexible Home Arrangements becomes more evident through a study of the Koebel residence, completed in 1940—the year that Flexible Home Arrangements was released. The commission came about after Eliel and Loja met Charles J. Koebel, a Swedish-American business owner who lived in the Detroit area, and his wife Ingrid on an ocean liner returning from Europe. Familiar with Eliel's work at Cranbrook and particularly impressed with the “plain and contemporary” style of his home there, the Koebels asked him to design a “modern house” for them.<sup>55</sup> Construction began in 1939, and initially Eliel and Eero headed the design of the architecture with Bob playing an administrative role.<sup>56</sup> Bob at some point took over the architectural design, and Pipsan was in charge of interior design (figs. 34-38).<sup>57</sup>

A number of architectural elements derived from the Saarinen residence, including the concentric circles in the ceiling and curved wall with tall niches in the dining room, a pole wall next to the staircase, a built-in couch with boxy ends in the library, and painted ornament on the bedroom doors.<sup>58</sup> Both homes possessed a number of elements understood by contemporaries as Nordic, including “extremely nordic [*sidi*]” chandeliers reminiscent of medieval Finnish lighting fixtures (figs. 33-34).<sup>59</sup> Bob referred to the fireplace in the Koebel girl's library as having a “certain

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<sup>55</sup> Ingrid Koebel quoted in Marsha Miro, “A House Ahead of Its Time,” *Detroit Free Press*, 21 Jan. 1982.

<sup>56</sup> Architectural statement, 24 Oct. 1939, contractor and owner agreement, Bob to Charles Koebel, 24 Oct. 1939, Contractor and owner agreement, 10 Nov. 1939, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 5, SP; Miro, “House Ahead of Its Time.”

<sup>57</sup> “The Swansons Design and Furnish a Home,” *Interiors* 100, no. 12 (July 1941): 13; “Four Bedrooms, Maid's Room, Four Baths, Lavatory, Breakfast Room,” *Architectural Forum* 75, no. 2 (Aug. 1941): 112-13; Miro, “House Ahead of Its Time.”

<sup>58</sup> Jari Jetsonen and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Saarinen Houses* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014), 167-68.

<sup>59</sup> “Swansons Design and Furnish a Home,” 14, 16.

Swedish accent,” and the built-in daybed with stencil designs, inspired by Finnish design traditions, resembled similar forms and surface decorations at Hvitträsk and other interiors designed by Eliel in Finland (Fig. 38).<sup>60</sup>

The Koebel residence was the first home decorated with Flexible Home Arrangements.<sup>61</sup> Using pieces from the line and other furnishings, Pipsan designed interiors that amplified the resemblance to Saarinen house interiors as well as another earlier project headed by Eliel, the “Room for a Lady” exhibited at the MMA in 1934. Textiles designed by Eliel and Loja in “Room for a Lady” and Saarinen residence interiors were comparable to those Pipsan used in the Koebel residence, with similar stripes, geometric patterns with concentric rectangles, and abstract motifs comprising triangles and orthogonal and hatch lines (fig. 29, 30, 35, 37, 38, and 40). Pipsan used Flexible Home Arrangements pieces in the Koebel residence that had clear precedents in the Saarinen residence: the circular dining table and the square card table (figs. 29-30). The overall scheme of the Koebel residence main bedroom was particularly similar to that of “Room for a Lady” (figs. 39-40). Both interiors had a light colour palette with dark trim and metallic accents, light-coloured glass curtains (i.e., curtains made of lightweight, sheer fabric) with a thin, dark horizontal stripe, and round-back statement chairs with dark vertical lines. In “Room for a Lady,” the statement chair was designed by Eliel and custom made by Robert W. Irwin, whereas the chair in the Koebel residence was fabricated by Herman Miller based on a design by Gilbert Rohde.<sup>62</sup> The case pieces in “Room for a Lady,” custom made to perfectly fit two walls of the exhibition space, had light-coloured bases with black metal drawer pulls that extended the width of the drawers.<sup>63</sup> In

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<sup>60</sup> Bob to Lawrence; See Eliel’s Villa Bobrinsky (1903), Suur-Merijoki (1902), and Haus Remer (1905), pictured in Hausen, *Eliel Saarinen Projects*, 63, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Bob to Lawrence.

<sup>62</sup> *Contemporary American Industrial Art*, 22; “Decorating Net Costs: Charles J. Koebel Residence,” undated, box 2, folder 6, SP; Phyllis Ross, *Gilbert Rohde: Modern Design for Modern Living* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 138.

<sup>63</sup> Jennie Moore, “Art Exhibit at the Metropolitan Reflects Progressive Steps Towards More Compact Living,” undated newspaper clipping, Loja’s scrapbook 1, 45, ESC.

the Koebel main bedroom, Pipsan replicated the custom-fit, high-contrast effect using Flexible Home Arrangements case units, ordered in a special bleached birch finish with dark trim and special long metal hardware. To these, Pipsan added a Flexible Home Arrangements vanity bench in the same bleached finish as the case units and a coffee table in a special dark walnut finish.<sup>64</sup> In other Koebel bedrooms, Pipsan again achieved a custom-made look similar to “Room for a Lady” with assemblages of Flexible Home Arrangements case units, but in the standard birch finish and different custom hardware for different rooms (figs. 36-38).<sup>65</sup> Using a total of fifty-six Flexible Home Arrangements pieces throughout the residence, Pipsan reasonably satisfied the clients’ desire to have a home in the style of Eliel, if not designed exclusively by him in the end. Any qualms with the project moving out of the renowned architect’s hands into Bob and Pipsan’s hands might have been quelled by the publicity and critical acclaim that followed the house’s completion. Photographs of the home were published in *Architectural Forum*, *Interiors*, and *House & Garden*.<sup>66</sup>

### Shifting credit

If Eliel was more of a source of inspiration and/or advisor for Flexible Home Arrangements than a main designer, he may have been given outsized credit in the press because he was the head of the architecture office out of which the line emerged. It was common practice to solely credit the head of an architecture office for work that came out of the office.<sup>67</sup> The way credit was assigned for Saarinen family projects up until the late 1930s reflected this practice, with Eliel often given sole credit for work that his family members contributed to. For some architectural projects as of the late

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<sup>64</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 31 July 1940, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 8, SP; Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 7 Aug. 1940, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 9, SP.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 31 July 1940; Johnson Furniture Co. invoice 7 Aug. 1940; Johnson Furniture Co. invoice, 20 Aug. 1940, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 9, SP.

<sup>66</sup> “Four Bedrooms, Maid’s Room, Four Baths, Lavatory, Breakfast Room”; “Swansons Design and Furnish a Home,” 12-17; “The Plan of Each of These Houses Was Specially Oriented to Catch a View,” *House & Garden*, Feb. 1942, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 92; Brown, “Room at the Top,” 237-46.

1930s, Eliel shared credit with his son and son-in-law. As of 1938, Eliel credited certain projects to himself and Eero as co-architects. For one such project in 1939, Eliel credited Bob as an associate.<sup>68</sup>

In two feature articles on Flexible Home Arrangements published in autumn 1940, in *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes & Gardens*, the line was credited as “Eliel Saarinen in collaboration with Eero Saarinen, J. Robert F. Swanson, and Renzo Rutili.”<sup>69</sup> This credit line suggested that Eliel was the head designer, assisted by the two junior architects plus Renzo Rutili, a Johnson house designer. These two articles are the only known instances of Rutili and Eero receiving credit for the line. As a Johnson employee, Rutili was well acquainted with the company’s manufacturing capabilities, so he may have helped make the furniture designs compatible with factory production. Perhaps Eero was initially included in the credit line as a sort of default, because he was an architect in his father’s architecture office and he had recently begun being co-credited on his father’s projects. Besides the credit lines in these two articles, there is no other compelling evidence that Eero contributed to the line.

In the two feature articles on Flexible Home Arrangements, Pipsan was not mentioned. Given that the line was a product of an architecture office, Pipsan may have initially been withheld credit in the press since she was not an architect. Moreover, furniture design was not a field extensively populated by women, with only a small number recognized for their work in the field by the 1930s in the United States.<sup>70</sup>

In entering furniture design, Pipsan may have found a female role model in Aino Marsio-Aalto, a Finnish architect-designer who was eleven years Pipsan’s senior. Despite training to be an architect, much of Aino Marsio-Aalto’s professional output was in furnishings design as well as interiors for her architect-designer husband Alvar Aalto’s buildings. In these interiors, she used

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<sup>68</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 136-39.

<sup>69</sup> Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 33; “Coordination Perfect,” 30.

<sup>70</sup> See Introduction.



furniture designed by her husband and also designed custom pieces herself. Many of the Aaltos' custom pieces were subsequently mass-produced by Artek, a furnishings company they formed in 1935. In the 1930s and 1940s, Aino Marsio-Aalto designed not only furniture but printed textiles, metal lamps, and glassware—all areas of mass-production design that Pipsan would eventually engage in too. Aino Marsio-Aalto received some recognition for her independent design work, such as winning awards at the 1936 Milan Triennial for her pressed glass designs as well as her design of the Artek exhibition display.<sup>71</sup> She developed a body of design work alongside working in partnership with her architect husband, maintaining a semblance of traditional gender roles that dictated a wife should be committed foremost to supporting her husband's career and should not overshadow him with her own accomplishments. Pipsan met Aino Marsio-Aalto on at least one occasion, in 1937 or 1938 when Pipsan was summering in Finland—around the same time Flexible Home Arrangements was gestating.<sup>72</sup> The two women may have met again later in 1938, when the Aaltos came to the United States for the first time to attend the opening of a MoMA exhibition on Alvar Aalto's work. During this trip they stopped at Cranbrook to visit Eliel and Loja.<sup>73</sup> Pipsan, surely aware of Aino Marsio-Aalto's work as an independent designer and in collaboration with her architect husband, was following in her footsteps by designing mass-produced furniture inspired by custom interiors for her husband's residences.

Pipsan was eventually given official design credit for Flexible Home Arrangements in a promotional booklet published by W. & J. Sloane by July 1941. The booklet explained that the line was “designed by Eliel Saarinen, world-famous architect, designer and president of Cranbrook

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<sup>71</sup> Kaarina Mikonranta, “Aino Marsio-Aalto—Interior and Furniture Designer,” in *Aino Aalto*, ed. Ulla Kinnunen (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2004), 124-34.

<sup>72</sup> Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022; Bob to Pipsan, 7 July 1938, box 8, folder 3, SP; Aino Aalto to Loja, 11 Oct. 1938, box 4, folder 10, SFP; Bobby Tigerman, “‘I Am Not a Decorator’: Florence Knoll, the Knoll Planning Unit and the Making of the Modern Office,” *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 1 (2007): 62.

<sup>73</sup> Mateo Kries et al., eds., *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2014), 632.

Academy of Art, with J. Robert F. and Pipsam [*sic*] Swanson of Cranbrook, in close collaboration with the Johnson Furniture company.”<sup>74</sup> Eliel was still portrayed as the head designer, and Bob and Pipsan were portrayed as playing supporting roles.

### Conclusion

As discussed in chapter 2, around the same time that Flexible Home Arrangements came out, Pipsan was transitioning from identifying as an interior decorator to wanting to be seen as an interior designer, a title with more professional and respectable—and less feminine—connotations. It was also around this time that she wanted to be known as a Saarinen. Perhaps this change in public image was related to the way her role in Flexible Home Arrangements was initially diminished in the press. Legitimizing her image might help her gain recognition for her work in furniture design, a field gendered as male.

In designing a line of furniture, for the first known time in her career, Pipsan flouted the gender-normative divisions in the design world—divisions that were heretofore abided by herself and her husband in their personal-work partnership. Pipsan probably felt she was perfectly capable of learning how to design furniture because Eliel had showed her that a good designer pursued every element of a lived environment.<sup>75</sup> She had witnessed her father design custom furniture for his interiors since she was a child. Because of how much he valued his early collaborations with the craftspeople who fabricated his furnishing designs, he probably conveyed to Pipsan that good designers did not just dash off drawings and leave it up to fabricators to sort out technical matters, but rather that good designers learned about fabrication and used that knowledge to inform their designs. The obstacles Pipsan had to overcome were not about her abilities to learn about furniture,

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<sup>74</sup> Sloane booklet.

<sup>75</sup> Pipsan to Ann Stacy, Executive Director, Michigan Society of Architects, 29 July 1969, box 7, folder 8, SP.

but rather had to do with social barriers. Pipsan may not have embarked in furniture design prior to the mid-to-late 1930s because there were not many well-known women furniture designers at the time.

Eliel, Bob, and Pipsan all contributed to Flexible Home Arrangements. Eliel had knowledge of furniture construction, design skills, design-world stature, and connections with distributors; he helped Pipsan secure access to the field of mass-produced furniture design and influenced the style of Flexible Home Arrangements. Bob had cabinetmaking experience and business savvy. And Pipsan had fabrication and market insight obtained through working as an interior designer. Although Pipsan was often withheld credit for the furniture line, she nonetheless gained experience by working on it. This project initiated a new path in her career, which she would pursue for at least the next twenty years, and which eventually led to her greatest critical success.

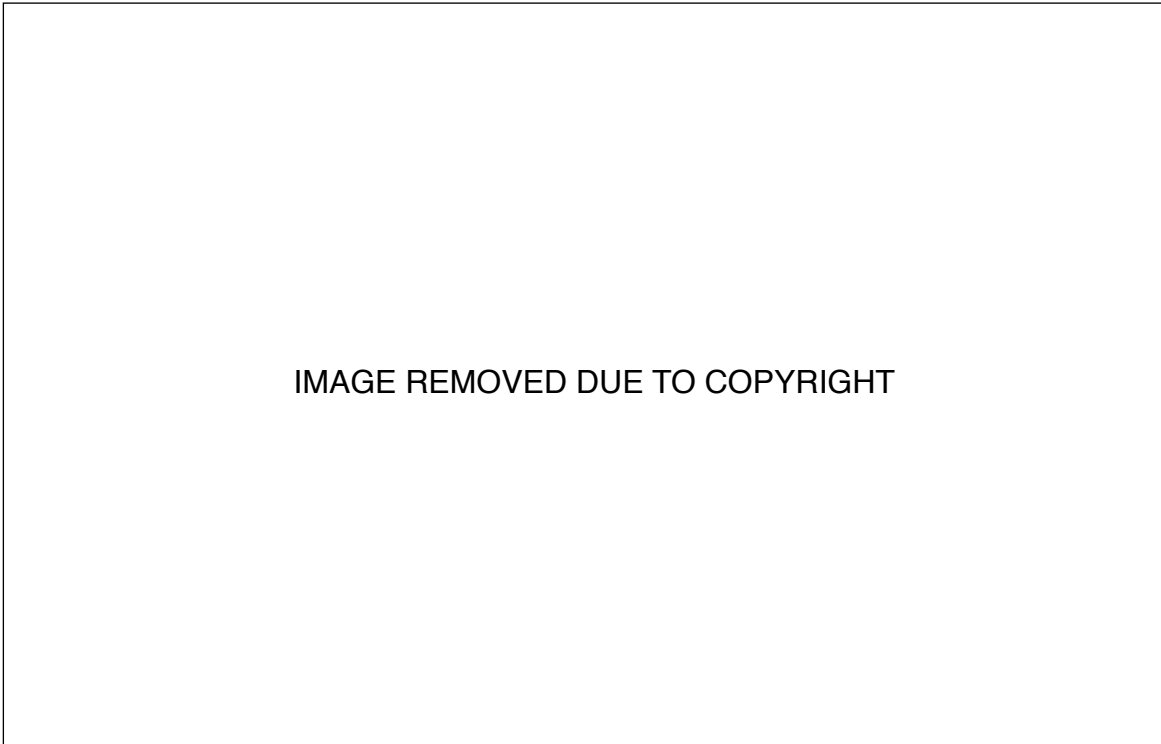


Figure 1. Flexible Home Arrangements table and chairs, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Sotheby's website)

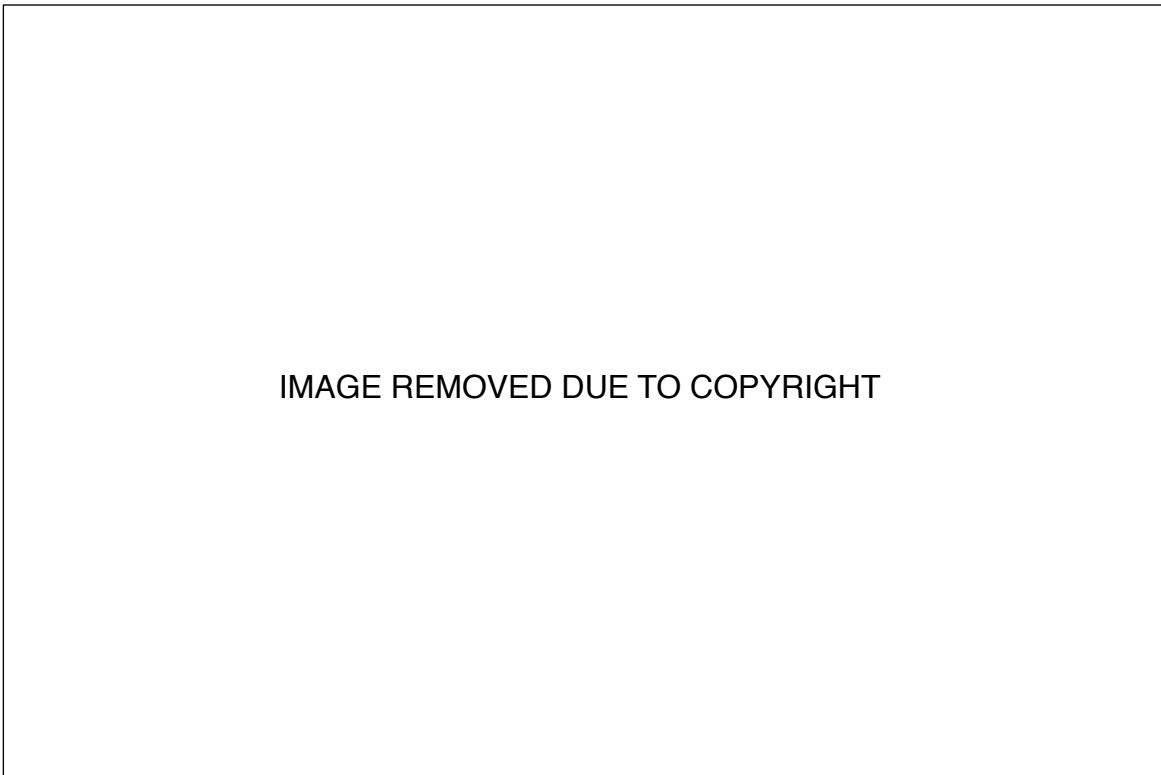


Figure 2. Flexible Home Arrangements table, chairs, and cabinets, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Overman and Smith, *Contemporary Handweaving*, 162)



Figure 3. Flexible Home Arrangements case units, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (1stDibs website)

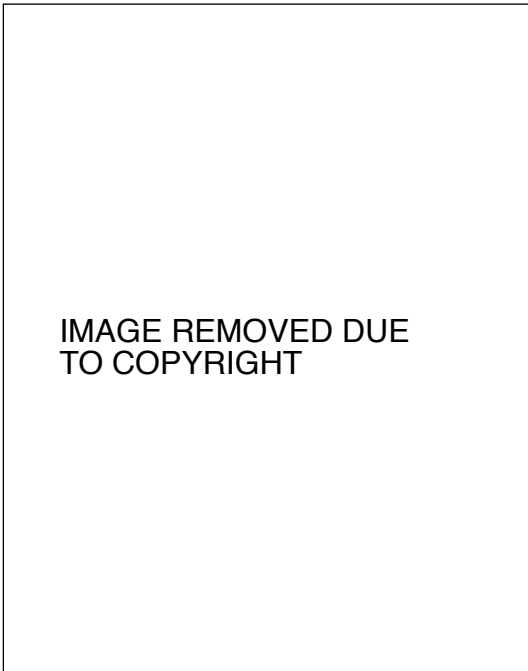


Figure 4. Flexible Home Arrangements chest, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Invaluable website)



Figure 5. Flexible Home Arrangements desk/vanity, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Invaluable website)



Figure 6. Flexible Home Arrangements vanity and bench, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

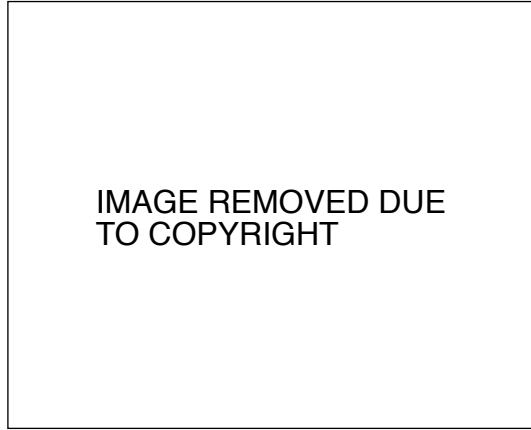


Figure 7. Flexible Home Arrangements cabinet, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

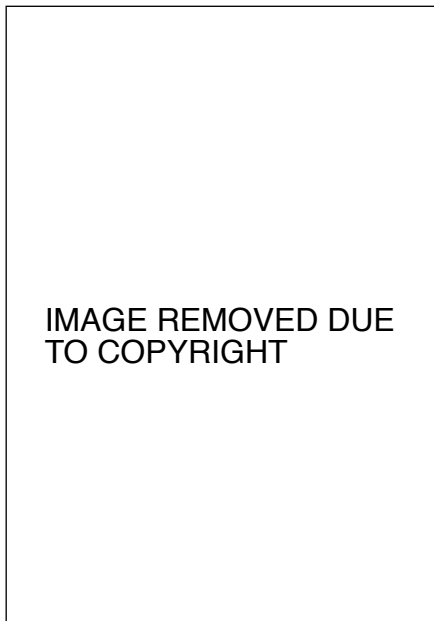


Figure 8. Flexible Home Arrangements chest, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)



Figure 9. Flexible Home Arrangements cabinets, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

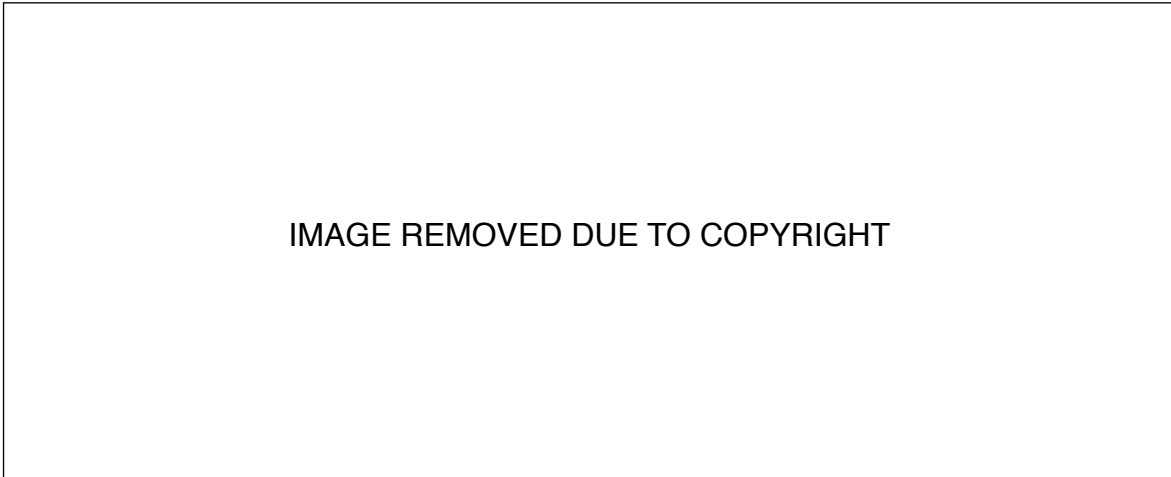


Figure 10. Flexible Home Arrangements bookshelves, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)



Figure 11. Flexible Home Arrangements corner shelf pieces, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

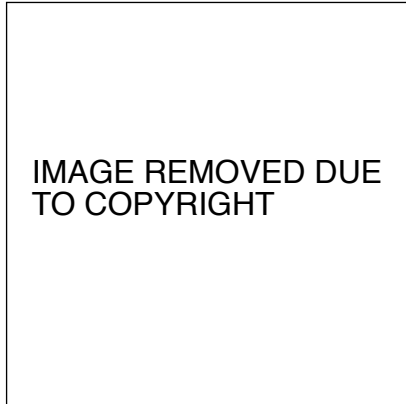


Figure 12. Flexible Home Arrangements end table, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)



Figure 13. Flexible Home Arrangements armchair, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

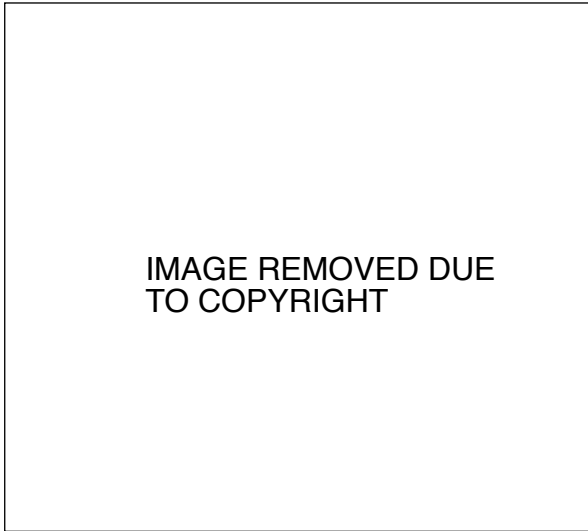


Figure 14. Flexible Home Arrangements twin bed, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

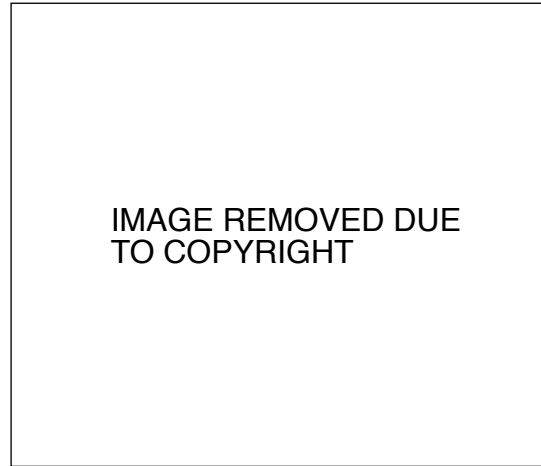


Figure 15. Flexible Home Arrangements nesting tables with a metal top, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (LA Modern Auctions website). The set was also offered with a wood top.



Figure 16. Flexible Home Arrangements coffee table with a metal top, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Leslie Hindman website). This style table also came in a square 31" x 31" size. Both sizes were also offered with wood tops.



Figure 17. Flexible Home Arrangements bar buffet, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)



Figure 18. Flexible Home Arrangements lamp or card table, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)





Figure 19. Calingaert residence dining room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The cabinet was custom made.

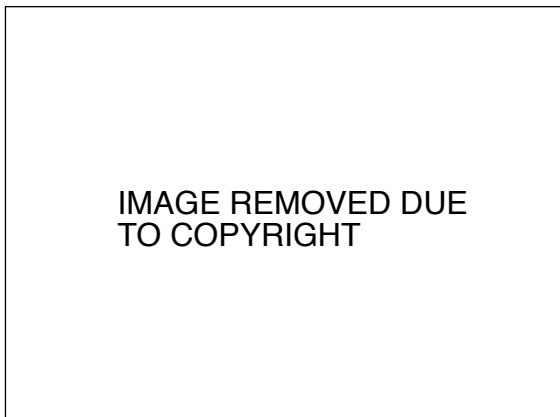


Figure 20. Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The end table/chest was custom made. The chair was designed by Gilbert Rohde (see Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 138).

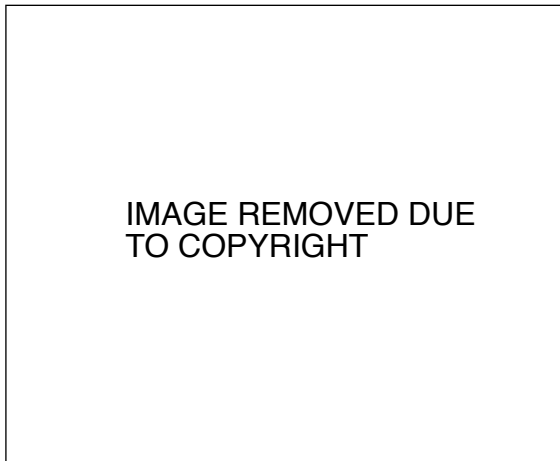


Figure 21. Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The seat was custom made. The table was designed by Gilbert Rohde (see Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 142).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 22. Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The bookshelf at right was custom made and built in. The bentwood chair at right was designed by Russel Wright (see Russel Wright Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Object ID 8119). The round table was designed by Gilbert Rohde (see Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 118, 142).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 23. Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). There is a set of nesting tables at right of fireplace.



IMAGE REMOVED  
DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 24. Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The bookcase was custom made and built in.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO  
COPYRIGHT

Figure 25. Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The desk was custom made. The bentwood chair was designed by Russel Wright (see Russel Wright Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Object ID 8119).



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 26. Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The round table was designed by Gilbert Rohde (see Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 142).

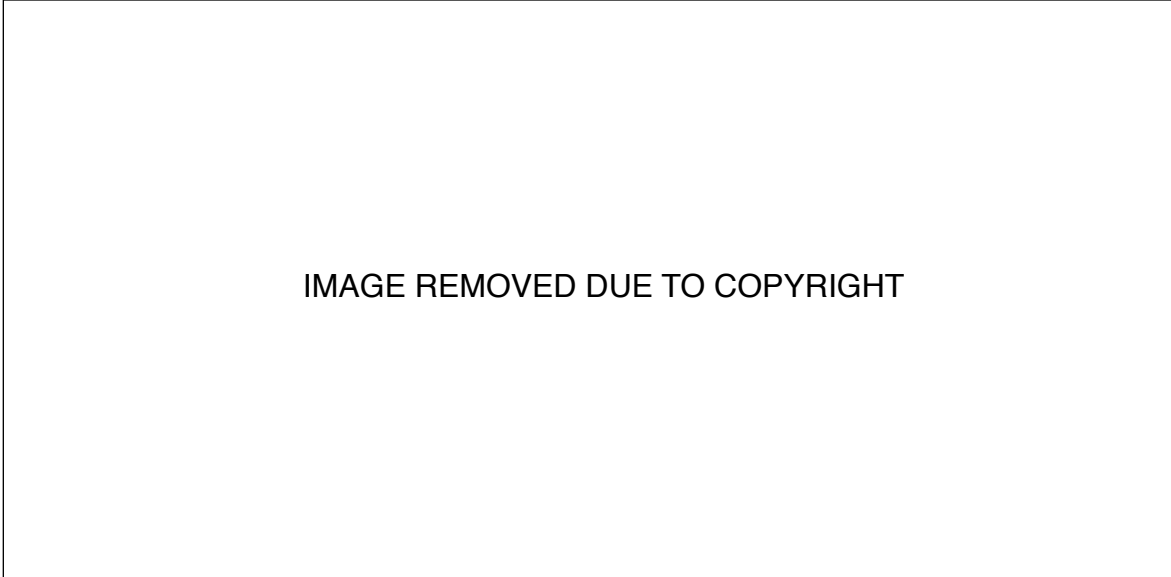


Figure 27. Model living room, designed by Pipsan and Bob, displayed at the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, 1935, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). The coffee table, bar buffet, and card table were designed by Bob.

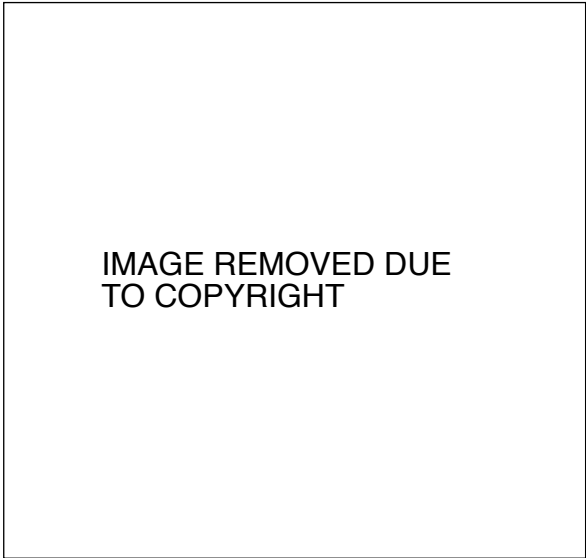


Figure 28. Saarinen residence living room, interiors and furniture designed by Eliel, ca. 1929-1930, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Wittkopp, *Saarinen House and Garden*, 60)

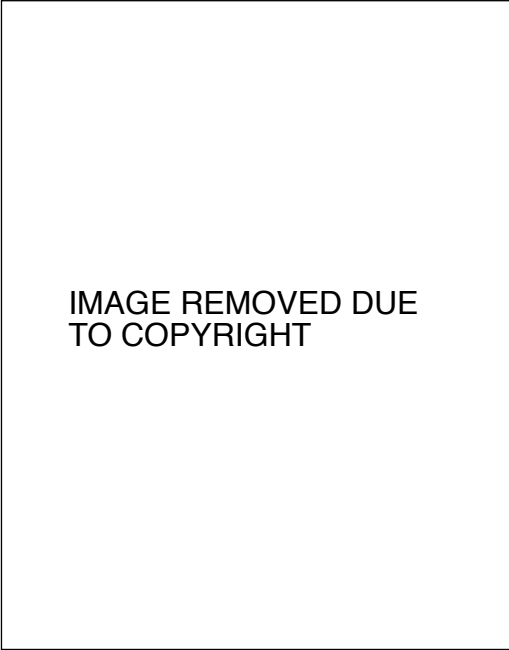


Figure 29. Saarinen residence living room, interiors and furniture designed by Eliel, rug designed by Loja, ca. 1929-1931, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research website)

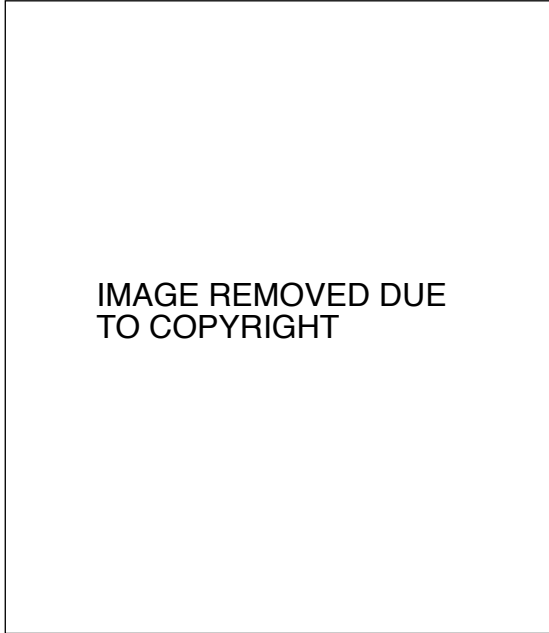


Figure 30. Saarinen residence studio alcove, interiors and furniture designed by Eliel, rug designed by Loja, ca. 1929-1931, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Wittkopp, *Saarinen House and Garden*, 99)

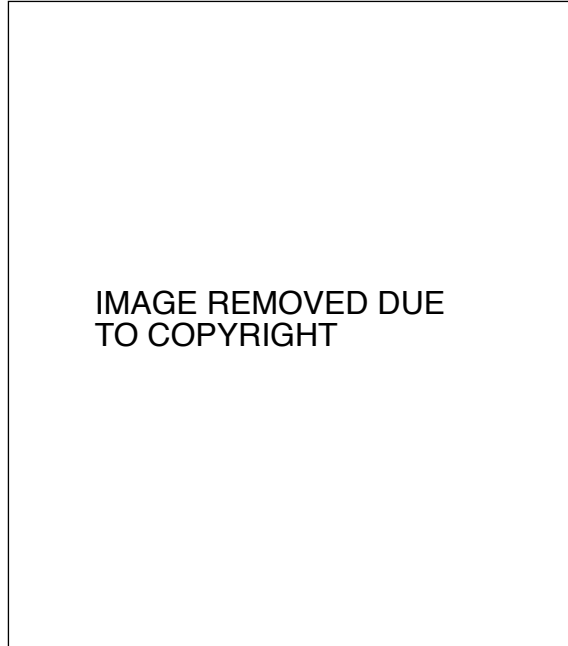


Figure 31. Credenza, designed by Eliel, ca. 1930, Saarinen residence studio, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Wittkopp, *Saarinen House and Garden*, 107)



Figure 32. Eliel's desk, fabricated 1930, Saarinen residence studio, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Wittkopp, *Saarinen House and Garden*, 111)

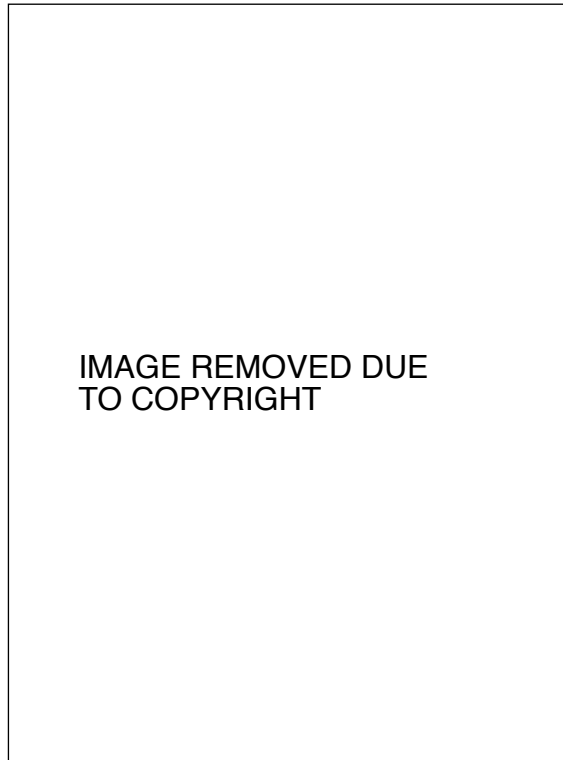


Figure 33. Dining room table, designed by Eliel, ca. 1929, Saarinen residence, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research website)

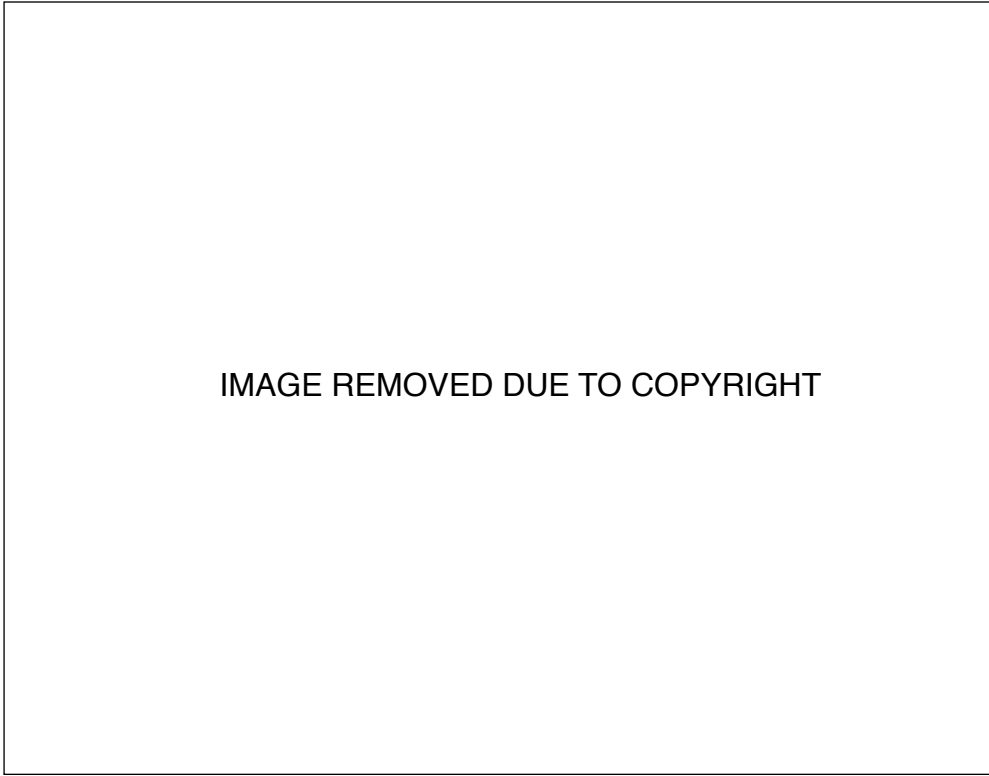


Figure 34. Koebel residence dining room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 15). The table and chairs were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.

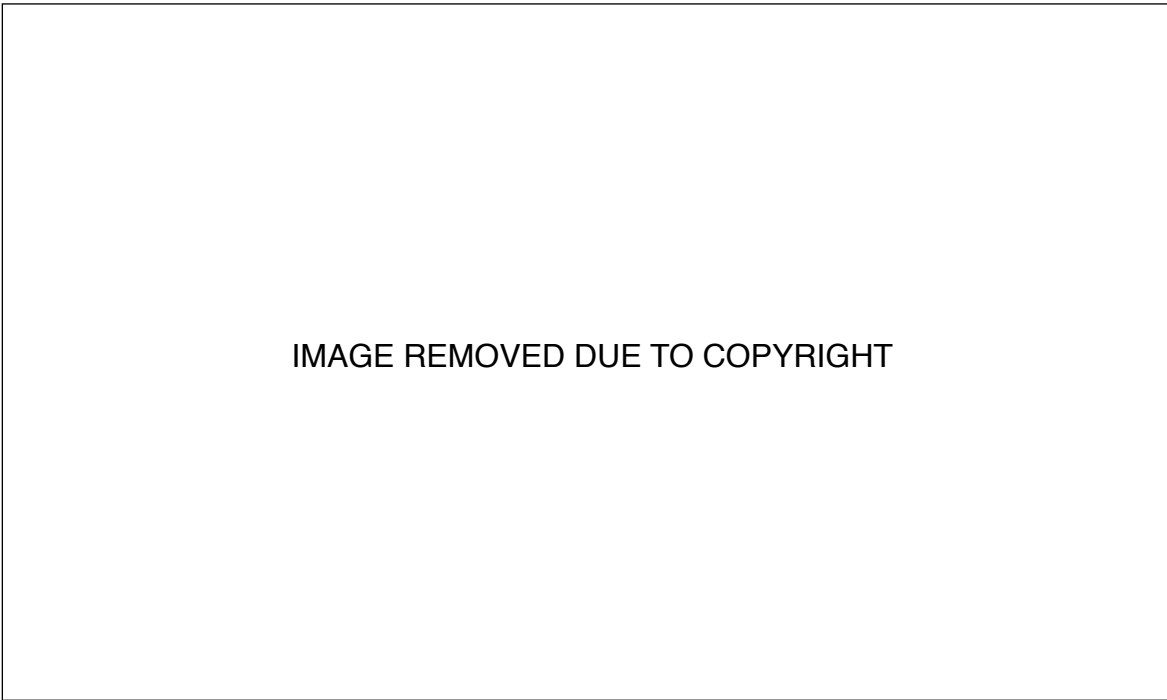


Figure 35. Koebel residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 17). The bar buffet, coffee table, and nesting tables were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.

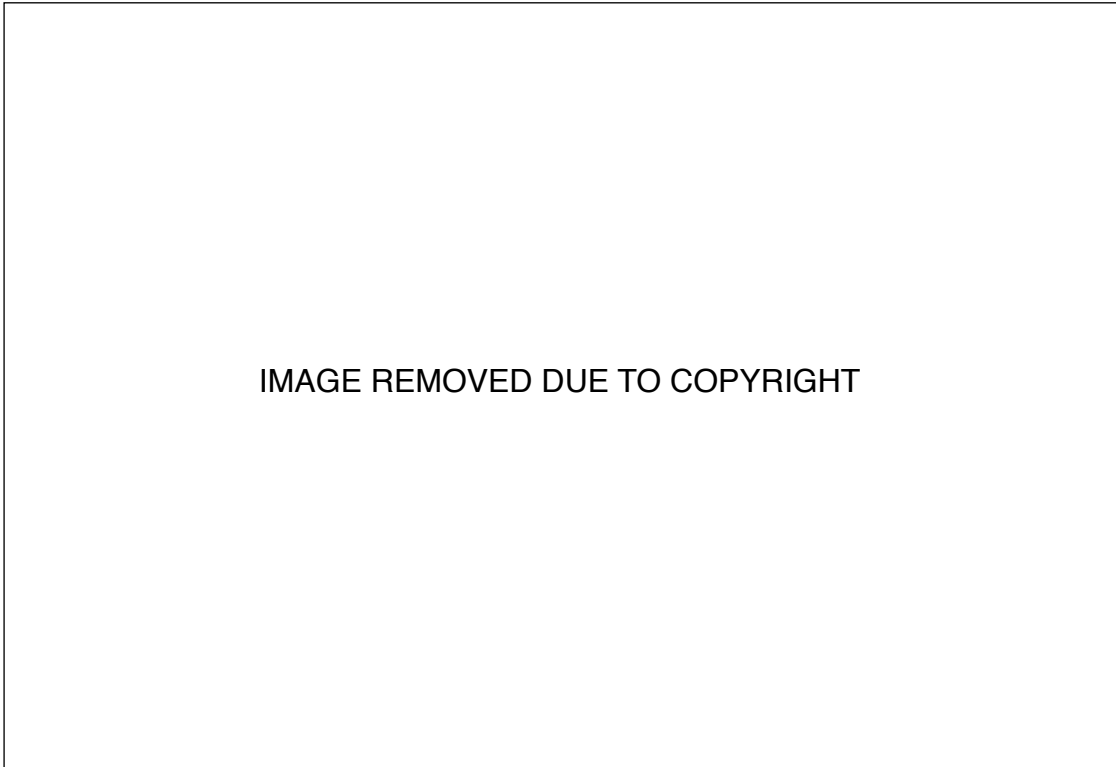


Figure 36. Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 16). The chest, shelves, and beds were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.

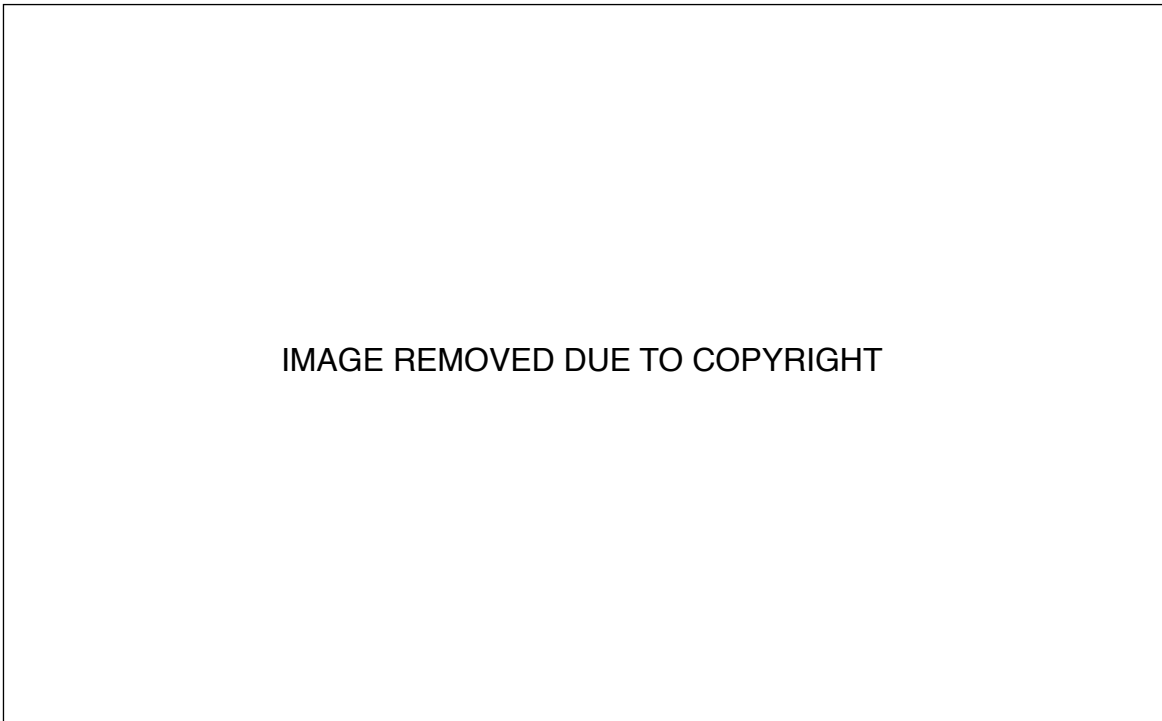


Figure 37. Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 17). The table at left and chest/desk assemblage were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 38. Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 16). The desk and chair were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.





IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 39. Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The chest/vanity assemblage, bench, and coffee table were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 40. "Room for a Lady," displayed at the *Contemporary American Industrial Art* exhibition, 1934, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York (Friedman, *Making America Modern*, 114). The interiors and furniture were designed by Eliel.

## Chapter 4: Modern Furniture for the American Market

While Flexible Home Arrangements addressed Pipsan's need for modern, customizable furniture for her interior design work, the line was also intended for mass-production and mass-distribution.

Designing a mass-produced line and designing interiors posed two different problems. With interiors, Pipsan had to address her clients' requests, but they already admired modern design—most of them had had Bob design modern houses for them. Mass-produced furniture, on the other hand, had to appeal to a wide population. This presented a challenge because in the 1930s the majority of consumers preferred traditional historicist styles, especially Colonial Revival, over modern ones.<sup>1</sup> In order for Flexible Home Arrangements to succeed on the market, customers of more conservative tastes than Pipsan's interior design clients had to be persuaded to buy new furniture in a style that was viewed as deviant from the norm. Thus, a brand identity was devised for the furniture line to encourage consumers to bring modern design into their homes. The Flexible Home Arrangements identity was communicated through a variety of marketing channels, including photographs of model rooms, the W. & J. Sloane booklet, miniature models of the furniture, and advertisements, as well as press coverage in newspapers and magazines. These outlets framed the furniture in ways that addressed concerns about modern furniture, tapped into popular decorating styles, reinforced traditional views about women's roles in the home, and related to socio-political and socio-economic conditions of the late Depression.

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<sup>1</sup> David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio* 22, no. 2/3 (1987): 116-17; See also chapter 3, footnote 30.

### Functionally and stylistically flexible furniture

Flexible Home Arrangements was publicized as modern, adaptable, and multipurpose.<sup>2</sup> Marketing material most heavily emphasized the modular case units, describing them as functionally flexible to allow customers to choose whatever piece(s) fitted their needs and space, be it be a small, medium, or large-sized room. The multifunctional-modular concept allowed modern-minded customers to break free of long-established decorating habits in which furniture was designed for specific uses in specific rooms. But, marketing material proposed that the pieces could still be grouped in the manner of traditional types and suites if the customer preferred to use it that way.<sup>3</sup>

Marketing and press claimed that the pieces were suitable for many “personal environments, regardless of whether [the customer’s] house or apartment is ‘done’ in modern or traditional manner.”<sup>4</sup> To demonstrate the furniture’s stylistic flexibility, marketing and press published photographs of model rooms decorated with Flexible Home Arrangements and furnishings generally understood as traditional, such as naturalistic floral-patterned wallpaper and upholstery as well as naturalistic flower paintings (figs. 1-3, 7).<sup>5</sup> Also pictured in the model rooms were a number of elements commonly included in Colonial Revival interiors: a pair of Neoclassical vases, Neoclassical harps and silhouette portraits printed on the wallpaper, a rug that recalled Colonial braided rag rugs, and an eighteenth-century-style wall clock (figs. 4-6). These and other object types and motifs associated with the Colonial Revival referenced home furnishings from the colonies in

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<sup>2</sup> Sloane booklet; Charles M. Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern,” *New York Sun*, 29 June 1940; “Coordination Perfect,” *House Beautiful*, Sept. 1940, 30-31; Christine Holbrook, “Here’s a Furniture Adventure,” *Better Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1940, 32-33, 99; John Stuart advertisement, *House Beautiful*, Dec. 1940, 99; W. & J. Sloane advertisement, *Los Angeles Sun*, 24 Nov. 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Sloane booklet.

<sup>4</sup> Sloane booklet. See also “Coordination Perfect.”

<sup>5</sup> The photographs of model rooms were published in the Sloane booklet, “Coordination Perfect,” and Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure.”

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as the post-revolutionary period and into the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The proposition that Flexible Home Arrangements could harmonize with traditional American furnishings was reiterated in advertisements, such as those published in *Interiors* by John Stuart. A 1940 advertisement, for example, described the furniture as “a new idea in modern design... fits rooms of any size or shape... combines beautifully with 18<sup>th</sup> century, regency [*sic*] or modern backgrounds.”<sup>7</sup> Advertisements featured drawings of the furniture in a range of modern and traditional rooms, including some with Colonial Revival details. One room was decorated with a pair of silhouette portraits, an oval braided rag rug, lighting fixtures that resembled glass oil lamps, and a shelf clock that looked like those famously developed in the early nineteenth-century by Ely Terry (fig. 8). Another room had a Neoclassical lyre wall decoration, eagle-pattern wallpaper, and Neoclassical swags on the window valance and skirt of an easy chair (fig. 8). These advertisements, as well as other marketing and press material, sought to convince potential buyers that customers did not have to adapt their tastes to the furniture. Moreover, in order to modernize a domestic interior, the customer need not live in a modern-style house or even fully redecorate; she could simply incorporate one or more pieces of Flexible Home Arrangements into her home. No matter what setting the furniture was placed within, the functionality and practicality of the furniture injected a breath of modern living into the house. By appealing to the large number of people with traditional tastes, marketing and press tried to reach as many potential consumers as possible.

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<sup>6</sup> On the Colonial Revival, see Richard Guy Wilson, “What Is the Colonial Revival?” in *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, ed. Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 1-12; Madaline Siefke Estill, “Colonial Revival,” in *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, vol. 1., ed. Joanna Banham (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 299-301; Judith Gura, *The Guide to Period Styles for Interiors: From the 17th Century to the Present*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 71-72, 128-36, 150-57.

<sup>7</sup> John Stuart advertisement, *Interiors* 100, no. 12 (July 1941): 5.

### The late Depression and the Federal Housing Administration

As discussed in chapters 1 through 3, there had been ebbs and flows in the economy in the 1930s. After the difficult early years, conditions began to improve slightly in 1935, only for there to be another recession in 1937 to 1938. By 1940, the year Flexible Home Arrangements was released, the economy was still depressed, but on an upswing, partly thanks to arms production for countries embroiled in World War II.<sup>8</sup> Unemployment was 14.6%, the lowest it had been in ten years, and the distribution of income was similar to that in 1930, just after the Wall Street crash but before its effects were fully felt.<sup>9</sup>

Early on in the Depression, the construction industry had been hit particularly hard. From 1929 to 1932, housing investment fell from \$68 billion to \$17.6 billion.<sup>10</sup> Since the mid-1930s, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration had enacted measures to spur growth in home construction, buying, and modernization. As part of Roosevelt's New Deal, the Federal Housing Administration was formed in 1934 to create jobs and stimulate the economy by reviving the hard-hit construction industry. During the Depression, prior to the Federal Housing Administration's initiatives, money lenders were loath to grant mortgages because of high foreclosure rates. And many middle-class people who had the money to buy or build a home were hesitant to do so in such economically precarious times. The Federal Housing Administration addressed both blockages by backing loans granted by banks or other private lenders.<sup>11</sup>

According to economic historian Louis Hyman, there were two categories of government-backed loans, both low interest and amortized. Title I loans were home improvement loans for those who already owned a house. They were for small amounts, typically a few hundred dollars, to

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<sup>8</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 464.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, 364, 464.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Hyman, *Debtor Nation: The History of America in Red Ink* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 48,

<sup>11</sup> Hyman, *Debtor Nation*, 56.

be used to modernize one's home (i.e., repair the structure of the house, install electricity, update the plumbing, or buy stationary appliances like heaters or air conditioners). Title II loans were mortgage loans to pay for the entire cost to buy or build a house. Compared to standard mortgages of the time, Title II loans were for longer periods and stipulated lower down payments, monthly payments, and interest rates. The enticing terms of Title II loans encouraged financially stable citizens to take out a loan to build or buy a house, and they increased the number of people for whom homeownership was possible. Both types of loans were granted by banks and private lenders, yet part of the loan was insured by the government in case of default; the government insurance mitigated the previous risks of granting loans. For houses funded by Title II loans, the Federal Housing Administration enacted strict requirements on quality standards. A good quality house ensured that it would last, promising to be a sound investment.<sup>12</sup>

Hyman explains that unlike most New Deal programs, which were aimed at the hardest-hit members of society, Title I and II loans were at first directed at people of moderate income who had been relatively financially stable during the Depression.<sup>13</sup> According to several metrics, the government's efforts to encourage home building and buying succeeded. By 1940, the Federal Housing Administration had backed a total of 782,784 Title II loans since the agency's founding six years earlier, the total amount backed being \$3,318,097,712. In the years leading up to 1940, the numbers of loans granted had climbed steadily. In 1937, 108,738 houses were financed by Title II loans, rising to 149,895 in 1938. In 1939, the number went up to 170,112 houses for the year, followed by 202,281 houses in 1940.<sup>14</sup> By 1939, residential housing investments had nearly recovered to the 1929 rate, in large part due to the efforts of the Federal Housing Administration.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hyman, 53-64.

<sup>13</sup> Hyman, 54-58.

<sup>14</sup> *Seventh Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Hyman, *Debtor Nation*, 46.

The government agency was commonly referred to as F.H.A., and promotional material for the loans featured the acronym designed into a seal-like graphic with bold, sans-serif type (figs. 9-10). The government heavily publicized the program on mass-media outlets including radio, newspapers, and movie theatres.<sup>16</sup> Through this wide exposure, even citizens who did not take out a government-backed loan to buy, build, or modernize would have been familiar with the name and acronym. By 1940, it was clear that the scheme had helped revive the construction industry, created many jobs, and allowed droves of Americans to own their own high-quality home. Thus, for many, the acronym and the housing program it represented possessed positive and patriotic associations.

Borrowers of the government-backed loans constituted a large, ripe market at which to target Flexible Home Arrangements because they had committed to improving their homes. Even people with Title I loans, to simply update their existing houses with modern appliances, might have been open to buying new, modern furniture. Since they were in the process of modernizing their home in one sense, perhaps they would be open to other modern ways of living. Buying new furniture, even just a single piece, was even more affordable than installing a new heater, and it was far less expensive than buying or building a new house.

As if to tap into the same associations as those conveyed by the Federal Housing Administration, the Flexible Home Arrangements furniture line was also referred to as F.H.A. in marketing and press. The acronym was branded on the furniture in a seal similar to the one used by the government (fig. 11). The acronym was also used throughout the W. & J. Sloane booklet, the cover of which was emblazoned with the three capital letters (fig. 12). Stars replaced the dots between F, H, and A, pressing the patriotic reference further. Using the same acronym for the furniture line as the popular government agency relayed a sense of quality, value, trust, patriotism,

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<sup>16</sup> Hyman, 61.

and possibly even government endorsement.<sup>17</sup> The implication was that, like F.H.A. loans, buying F.H.A. furniture was a good investment in the country as well as one's own future. Consumers who were buying or building a new home or modernizing an existing one, as well as the large number of renters who also wanted to update their homes, might assume that the acronym guaranteed high-quality furniture just as the government agency guaranteed a high-quality home.

Furthermore, marketing material for Flexible Home Arrangements associated the modern furniture with the same house styles promoted by the government. Most houses built using Title II loans were in Colonial Revival styles, which were favoured by government officials who provided advice and resale estimates to money lenders. Because Colonial Revival had been popular in the United States for many decades, many believed it would remain popular for years to come. Like a high-quality house, a house style that was resistant to changes in fashion was thought to be a good investment.<sup>18</sup> Plenty of the new Colonial Revival homes being built would need furniture to go in them. By styling Flexible Home Arrangements with Colonial Revival and other traditional-style furnishings in model rooms, the marketing proposed that the modern furniture was suited to the style of houses endorsed by government officials.

Flexible Home Arrangements marketing and press also associated the furniture with the same size houses as those targeted by the Federal Housing Administration. Initially, from 1934 to 1938, the housing program was geared towards middle-class people, and most houses financed using government-backed loans were considered to be of moderate cost.<sup>19</sup> Although the program greatly expanded the number of people who could own a home, for many, home ownership was still out of

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<sup>17</sup> A copy of the Sloane booklet in the Johnson Furniture Co. archives is stamped on the cover in red ink: "Not Connected in Any Way with the Federal House Administration." Perhaps Johnson became concerned about using the same acronym as the government agency or were asked to clarify that the furniture line was not related to the agency. 1985.16.7a, Johnson Furniture Company Collection, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>18</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 242; Other New Deal projects promoted Colonial American architecture. Gebhard, "Colonial Revival," 112.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, 240-42.



reach. Following the 1937 recession, in 1938 the Federal Housing Administration made amendments to the program to encourage people of lesser means to take out a mortgage to buy or build a home. The agency put rates on a sliding scale that gave better terms for lower-value (i.e., smaller-sized) houses, whereas previously, the same terms had applied no matter the value of the house.<sup>20</sup> In the two years preceding the amendments, around 50,000 small homes were built per year. Then in 1938, the year the agency focused on small-home construction, the number of small homes nearly doubled to 100,000 homes. In 1939, the number went up to almost 125,000.<sup>21</sup> In 1940, the year Flexible Home Arrangements came out, the government continued their crusade to address the need for small homes.<sup>22</sup>

Marketing and press material on Flexible Home Arrangements affirmed how suitable the furniture was for small homes. Supposedly, the thirty-inch height of the case furniture, shorter than standard furniture of the time, made rooms feel larger than their actual size.<sup>23</sup> The *New York Sun* reported that the furniture line was in fact designed in response to the burst in small-house construction spurred by the government policies, explaining that “the group was really designed to meet the demands of the small houses built under the Federal Housing Administration, for most authorities are agreed that the building efforts of the next few years will lie in the range of the small home. This does not restrict their use, however, because the selling plan will stress their adaptability to any home.”<sup>24</sup> A *House Beautiful* article concurred that the furniture was particularly apt for smaller spaces, calling the line a solution for the “hundreds of thousands of new little houses” being built throughout the country.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Fifth Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration* (Washington DC.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> *Sixth Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Sixth Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Sloane booklet.

<sup>24</sup> Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern.”

<sup>25</sup> “Coordination Perfect,” 30.

### Shared American values

Marketing material associated the furniture with some of the best-known small homes of the day: those sponsored by *Life* magazine. Only four years after its founding in 1936, the general-interest magazine boasted 2.86 million subscribers, mostly middle class, with each copy read by an average of fourteen to seventeen people.<sup>26</sup> The magazine's founder, Henry Luce, used the magazine to attempt to define, guide, and celebrate American (white) middle-class culture.<sup>27</sup> In the late 1930s, Luce also used *Life* to incite public interest in modern design and architecture, which he personally admired, by conducting polls on reader preference between "modern or traditional" houses and publishing several articles that promoted modern interiors. In 1938 and 1940, *Life* sponsored house design competitions in collaboration with *Architectural Forum*, another Luce-owned publication that promoted modern architecture. Competition entries were designed by prominent architects in both traditional (including Colonial Revival) and modern styles.<sup>28</sup> Reflecting the government's late 1930s focus on small-home construction, the 1940 *Life* competition entries were required to be of a lower price bracket than the 1938 designs.<sup>29</sup> By 1940, 121 full-scale versions of competition entries had been built across the country. Consumers could also purchase miniature models of certain designs, complete with miniature furniture. In the 1930s, full-scale model house competitions were common, and the *Life* homes were among the most talked about.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> James L. Baughman, "Who Read *Life*? The Circulation of America's Favorite Magazine," in *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 42, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Baughman, 42; Erika Doss, "Introduction: Looking at *Life*: Rethinking America's Favorite Magazine, 1936-1972" in *Looking at Life Magazine*, 11-13.

<sup>28</sup> Gebhard, "Colonial Revival," 113-16; William B. Roads, "The Long and Unsuccessful Effort to Kill Off the Colonial Revival," in *Re-Creating the American Past*, 15-16; "Atlantic Clipper has Modern Interiors," *Life*, 23 Aug. 1937, 39; "Furniture for Modern Living," *Life*, 31 July 1939, 42-43; "Swedish Furniture at Fairs is Influencing U.S. Taste," *Life*, 31 July 1939, 45; "Good Rooms on a Budget," *Life*, 31 July 1939, 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> "Eight Houses for Modern Living," *Life*, 26 Sept. 1938, 45; "Life Houses," *Life*, 1 July 1940, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Gebhard, "Colonial Revival," 113-16.

Marketing and press material on Flexible Home Arrangements associated the line with the popular model homes by using a miniature *Life* model house to demonstrate the furniture concept. The miniature house, decorated with miniature Flexible Home Arrangements models, was photographed and published in the W. & J. Sloane booklet, *House Beautiful*, and the *Detroit News* (fig. 13).<sup>31</sup> The miniatures were also distributed to retailers for use in live demonstrations.<sup>32</sup> Associating the furniture line with *Life* homes implied that Flexible Home Arrangements was popular, middle class, and American, even though it was modern. While it is not known how successful the magazine was in its crusade to encourage Americans to embrace modern design, *Life* magazine generally carried cultural clout for its readers.<sup>33</sup> The repeated pairing of the *Life* homes with the furniture gave the (false) impression that the furniture, like the model houses, was *Life* sponsored.

To emphasize the American-ness of the furniture, marketing and press material singled out the birch wood used to veneer many pieces, describing the wood as “Michigan,” “Northern,” “native,” or “American” birch.<sup>34</sup> Birch had come to be associated with America and American history because the strong, versatile wood was native to northern North America and abundantly available to colonists, who used it to make essential goods, including furniture.<sup>35</sup> In early twentieth century literature, birch trees symbolized the American pioneers because the hardy trees grow quickly in uncultivated land and can withstand harsh environmental aggressors.<sup>36</sup> Birch, as well as other medium-tone native hardwoods such as maple—the secondary wood used in Flexible Home

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<sup>31</sup> “Coordination Perfect”; Florence Davies, “Cranbrook Designs Furniture for Modern Homes,” undated *Detroit News* clipping [late June-early July 1940], SP; See also John Stuart, Inc. to Bob, 13 June 1941, box 9 folder 3, SP.

<sup>32</sup> Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern.”

<sup>33</sup> Baughman, “Who Read *Life*,” 41-42; Doss, “Introduction,” 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> Sloane booklet; “Coordination Perfect,” 30; Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern”; Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 33; Marsman, “Contemporary Marches On,” 18; Davies, “Cranbrook Designs Furniture.”

<sup>35</sup> Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *Four Centuries of American Furniture* (Radnor, PA: Wallace-Homestead, 1995), 48; Helen Comstock, *American Furniture: Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Century Styles* (Exton, PA: Schiffer, 1962), 129-30; David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 21; Henry H. Gibson, *American Forest Trees* (Chicago: Hardwood Record, 1913), 583-86.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 52-53.

Arrangements—were also favoured by Colonial Revival designers.<sup>37</sup> For many, the Colonial Revival represented values associated with the United States at the time of the nation’s founding, namely simplicity, morality, and democracy. On the other hand, modern design was accused by some detractors of being a fleeting, foreign style imported from Europe, ill-suited to American mores.<sup>38</sup> Flexible Home Arrangements publicity suggested that, even though the furniture was modern, it possessed time-honoured virtues of practicality, durability, and ingenuity—virtues associated with Colonial America.<sup>39</sup> *Better Homes & Gardens* went so far as to state that Flexible Home Arrangements was “all-American furniture.”<sup>40</sup>

According to cultural historian Michael G. Kammen, interest in American history was generally strong throughout the interwar period. Many private and public collections of American artefacts were formed; Early American period rooms were installed in museums across the country; and institutions devoted to study of American history were established, such as Colonial Williamsburg and the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. Moreover, some of Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives sought to preserve, commemorate, and catalogue American traditions and history. A broader interest in the nation’s past manifested in a burst in writing on American history, biography, and literature.<sup>41</sup>

Cultural and political historian Wendy Wall has shown that over the course of the 1930s, especially in the second half of the decade, discussions about the American *present* escalated in popular discourse, with attempts to define the values that united all citizens. The terms “American Way” and “American Dream” poured out of popular media, appearing on billboards, newspaper

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<sup>37</sup> “The Market Comes to You,” *Interiors* 102, no. 3 (Oct. 1942): 32.

<sup>38</sup> Rhoads, “Kill off Colonial Revival,” 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Sloane booklet.

<sup>40</sup> Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 33.

<sup>41</sup> See Michael G. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 299-530.

headlines, and book titles. Roosevelt used the term “American way” in his 1936 speech accepting the Democratic Party’s renomination for President; in the same year, Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace wrote an article in *Scribner’s Magazine* called “The Search for an American Way”; and in 1937, *Harper’s* magazine sponsored an essay contest inviting readers to define the popular phrase. Despite the repeated use of such phrases and efforts to delineate shared American values, there was little consensus on what the “American Way” and “American Dream” meant. Wall argues that the spike in interest in what it meant to be American emerged in response to a variety of factors, including a depression so catastrophic that it forced many people to question their faith in American capitalism, the increasing social and political power of immigrant communities, and the migration of black Americans from the South. According to Wall, the strongest catalyst for the effort to determine unifying American values, however, was the increasing threat of fascism and communism abroad and the fear that such foreign and anti-democratic influences were taking root in American soil. The prospect of entering a European war grew greater as the decade came to an end.<sup>42</sup> Describing Flexible Home Arrangements with so many allusions to American culture, past and present, inserted the line of products in this topical conversation.

### Finnish modern design

While this conversation was taking place, birch wood was also increasingly associated with the modern furniture of Alvar Aalto. By the mid-1930s, Aalto had concluded that the modernism that had emerged out of interwar Germany, France, Holland, and the Soviet Union, which had come to be known as the International Style, was cold and inhospitable due to its reliance on industrial materials (especially metal) and geometric forms. With the goal to create aesthetic, well-made mass-

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<sup>42</sup> Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15-35. See also Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 510.

produced furniture, Aalto redressed what he saw as the shortcomings of the International Style by turning to traditional materials, namely birch wood, abundant in Finland, to design furniture that was attuned to human physiological and psychological needs—i.e., to design comfortable and comforting furnishings and environments. Working with manufacturers, Aalto developed innovative techniques to laminate and bend birch wood into free-flowing forms that mimicked the contours in nature and the human body.<sup>43</sup> In the late 1930s, a small design elite in the United States lauded Aalto's work as a more humanistic and appealing iteration of modern design than the International Style.<sup>44</sup>

Like many young modernists, the Swansons drew inspiration from the work of Alvar and Aino Marsio-Aalto. In the wake of the founding and rise to prominence of Artek, the Aaltos' mass-produced furnishings company, the Swansons designed Flexible Home Arrangements. Both Flexible Home Arrangements pieces and the Aaltos' furniture designs comprised simple forms and birch wood. Flexible Home Arrangements case units, with their boxy forms, recessed platform bases, horizontal pulls, and natural birch finish, were similar to a chest designed by the Aaltos in their own home in Helsinki, completed in 1936, as well as a desk Aino Marsio-Aalto designed for Artek around 1938 (figs. 14-15). Flexible Home Arrangements most strongly recalled the Aaltos' work in the curved elements, such as the ends of the nesting tables and the U-shaped legs of the vanity bench, which mimicked the look of Alvar Aalto's renowned bentwood innovations (figs. 16-18).

Similarities between the Swansons' and Aaltos' work extended to architectural elements and other furnishings. Completed by Bob and Pipsan in 1940, the Eden residence was like an asymmetrical assemblage of blocks in a range of natural materials, textures, and values, from dark

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<sup>43</sup> Tim Benton, "Modernism and Nature," in *Modernism: Designing a New World*, 313-15.

<sup>44</sup> Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, "Aalto Goes to America," in *Aalto and America*, ed. Stanford Anderson, Gail Fenske, and David Fixler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 77-82; Simon Breines, "Forward," in *Aalto: Architecture and Furniture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 5.

brown ribbed wood panelling to light-coloured rough masonry, much like the Aaltos' residential designs from the 1930s, such as their own house completed in 1936 and Villa Mairea completed in 1939 (figs. 19-20). Inside the Eden residence, there was a pole wall room divider in a wavy shape like the amoeboid forms Alvar Aalto had become known for (figs. 21-22). Pipsan brought more amoeboid shapes into the Eden home through the textile print in the living room and a vase and ashtray reminiscent of Alvar Aalto's celebrated Savoy vase designed in 1936 (figs. 23-25). A desk chair Pipsan used in the Eden residence, designed by Gilbert Rohde for Heywood-Wakefield, also demonstrated an influence of the Aaltos in the bentwood legs (fig. 26).<sup>45</sup> Pipsan had used another bentwood chair, designed by Russel Wright for Heywood-Wakefield, in the Calingaert residence in 1936 to 1937.<sup>46</sup> In the Eden residence, along with the furnishings inspired by the Aaltos, Pipsan used many Flexible Home Arrangements pieces (figs. 22-23, 26).

In other interiors from the early 1940s, Pipsan mixed Aalto-designed tables and chairs with Flexible Home Arrangements chests, side chairs, and beds (fig. 27).<sup>47</sup> Pipsan was not only inspired by the Aaltos' work but saw her own work as a complement to it. Yet, in the marketing of Flexible Home Arrangements, the associations of birch with Finland were not mentioned, nor were the Nordic backgrounds of the line's three designers.

A spike in anti-communism at the end of the decade may have been an additional reason for the Flexible Home Arrangements marketing *not* to frame the furniture as Finnish or Nordic. For the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Aaltos had designed the Finnish Pavilion with themes related to the land, the people, labour, and its fruits. Some conservatives interpreted these themes as being

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<sup>45</sup> David A. Hanks, *Innovative Furniture in America from 1800 to the Present* (New York: Horizon, 1981), 65.

<sup>46</sup> The Wright-designed bentwood chairs in chapter 3 (figs. 22, 25) are pictured in a photograph of Heywood-Wakefield furniture, Russel Wright Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Object ID 8119, accessed 24 March 2022, [https://scrconline.syr.edu/p/scrcdc/wright\\_r.8119](https://scrconline.syr.edu/p/scrcdc/wright_r.8119).

<sup>47</sup> Invoices and itemizations, MacDonald apartments, 1941, box 4, folder 19, SAR; Johnson Furniture Co. and Artek-Pascoe invoices, 1940-1941, Reichold residence, box 12, folder 7, SAR.

linked to communism, and Alvar Aalto had previously been accused of being a Bolshevik.<sup>48</sup> The year 1939 was an inauspicious time to present themes that could be read this way in the United States. In August, the reputation of communism took a nosedive when Joseph Stalin, after years of claiming to lead the fight against the Nazi party, made a nonaggression pact with Adolf Hitler.<sup>49</sup> Increasingly both fascism and communism were lumped together under the derisive label “totalitarianism,” a mode of governing viewed as diametrically opposed to American democracy.<sup>50</sup>

The marketing of Flexible Home Arrangements countered potentially unappealing associations by emphasizing the line’s American-ness and proposing that the furniture was right at home in overtly American-style interiors. Clearly, Pipsan and Bob did not design the line with such ideas in mind, but rather were interested in modernism of the Aalto vein. Yet this was kept out of the narrative presented to the public.

#### The amateur decorator and the professional architect

In addition to reflecting the socio-political and socio-economic climate of around 1940, marketing and press material on Flexible Home Arrangements spoke to gender normative assumptions about women and their roles in the home. As if to appeal to a stereotypical woman’s taste, the model rooms included furnishings in styles considered feminine, such as the naturalistic floral patterns on the wallpaper and textiles.<sup>51</sup> The W. & J. Sloane booklet used the second person “you” to directly address the potential customer, clarifying throughout the text that that person was a woman and a homemaker. It also explained how the furniture concept tapped into women’s supposedly natural

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<sup>48</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 86-87; Peter B. MacKeith and Kerstin Smeds, *The Finland Pavilions: Finland at the Universal Expositions, 1900-1992* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy City, 1992), 63.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 153-56.

<sup>50</sup> Wall, *Inventing the “American Way,”* 58.

<sup>51</sup> See chapters 2 and 3 in Penny Sparke, *As Long as It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora, 1995).



proclivity to decorate: “If you are a decorator at heart ... and what woman isn’t? ... you will take special delight in the flexibility of the FHA units.” A *House Beautiful* article elaborated that the furniture was an aid for “thousands of housewives in a frenzy of excitement studying their rooms, facing the problem of furnishing them.”<sup>52</sup> The W. & J. Sloane booklet espoused the expressive potential of home decorating, boasting that Flexible Home Arrangements provided “the advantage of knowing that *your* home, because its furnishings were individually selected and arranged by you, will have the imprint of your own personality.”<sup>53</sup>

Social historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has shown that in the interwar period, women’s magazines in the United States framed buying for the home and doing housework as a joyful existence for a married woman.<sup>54</sup> Historians Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer and Lois Scharf have both argued that the Depression, in certain ways, reinforced normative gender roles. Middle-class wives were socially pressured to work unpaid in their homes if their families could afford it. According to Gallup polls conducted in 1936 and 1939, approximately 80% of Americans disapproved of wives working outside the home if their husbands were employed.<sup>55</sup> A 1936 *Fortune* magazine poll showed similar results, with only 15% of respondents approving of women working full time outside the home. Of respondents who disapproved of women taking such jobs, 35% justified their response with the reason that a woman’s place is in the home, while 36% replied that working women took jobs away from the droves of unemployed men.<sup>56</sup> For these reasons, many private and state employers, including the federal government, discriminated against married women in the 1930s, sometimes firing or refusing to hire them.<sup>57</sup> Even Eleanor Roosevelt, who generally

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<sup>52</sup> “Coordination Perfect,” 30.

<sup>53</sup> See Introduction on the gendering of home decorating as female and the expressive potential of home decorating.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning,” 177-83.

<sup>55</sup> Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, *The Female Labor Force in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976), 44-45.

<sup>56</sup> Oppenheimer, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 43-65, 75-85, 102-107.

supported wives having jobs if the work did not interfere with childcare, husband care, and housework, conceded in 1933 that, in the present state of emergency, it was “perhaps necessary” for women to forfeit their jobs if their husband was gainfully employed.<sup>58</sup> One vocal opponent of wives working outside the home argued that such women were “deserters from their post of duty, the home, which in the American system of government is the only unit of society on which the country depends for existence.”<sup>59</sup> In this light, working in the home was a patriotic act that helped the country recover from the Depression.

During the Depression, many housewives’ budgets for home-related purchases were constrained to some degree. Because of the widespread need to pinch pennies, do-it-yourself (DIY) home improvement projects were popular, with women undertaking tasks such as sewing curtains and painting furniture.<sup>60</sup> Doing it herself allowed a housewife to update her home while conserving resources. Although buying new furniture required spending far more money than buying a can of paint, the decorating approach espoused in Flexible Home Arrangements marketing nonetheless embraced the DIY fad. The multipurpose-modular concept, in which the customer had to decide where in the home to use the line and which modular units she would assemble into a group or use individually, begged more creativity and self-reliance of a housewife than decorating with conventional furnishings. Even though women were thought to possess an innate ability to decorate, buying new furniture was an investment, and envisioning how modern items would fit into her home might be intimidating. To ease any anxieties the customer might have, the marketing described the work of decorating with Flexible Home Arrangements as a “thrilling adventure.”<sup>61</sup>

Marketing attempted to help housewives through the process without robbing them of the

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<sup>58</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, *It's up to the Women* (New York: Nation Books, 2017), chap. 11, ebooks.com.

<sup>59</sup> Florence Birmingham quoted in “Dares First Lady on Working Wives,” *New York Times*, 4 June 1939.

<sup>60</sup> Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning,” 193.

<sup>61</sup> Sloane booklet. See also Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 32.

agency and creativity offered by DIY home decorating. The last pages of the W. & J. Sloane booklet were printed with grid paper, on which the housewife was advised to draw her floor plans before visiting a retailer. Once there, with her floor plans in tow, a salesman would re-draw her plans to a larger scale—the same scale as the miniature furniture models and *Life* model home available at the store.<sup>62</sup> The booklet insisted, “You will find there is no limit to the ensembles you may create in this delightful ‘pre-view’ way. You may spend as much time as you wish, leisurely arranging and rearranging these tiny models just the way you want them to appear in your home.” This activity was meant to show the customer how flexible the furniture line was and how easily items could fit into her rooms. Furthermore, the W. & J. Sloane booklet explained, the decorating “delights” did not have to end with the room arrangement the customer chose in the store. Since the pieces could serve so many purposes, the furniture could be moved within a room or from room to room, temporarily or permanently.<sup>63</sup> The housewife could continue to practice her decorating skills with the real pieces in her home indefinitely. Such a promise may have helped assuage any concerns that housewives might have had about committing to new furniture because the pieces could easily go someplace else in her home if her initial instinct proved inaccurate or if her decorating needed freshening up down the road. The process of decorating with Flexible Home Arrangements was framed optimistically and allowed the housewife to execute her supposedly natural duty (and privilege) in the home within the lingering economic constraints or anxieties caused by the Depression.

Although marketing material depicted the housewife-decorator as a self-reliant woman who could take control of her interiors with Flexible Home Arrangements, she was concurrently portrayed as childlike. Describing how the housewife would use the miniature models, *Better Homes*

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<sup>62</sup> Sloane booklet. See also Stow, “Grand Rapids Show Modern”; Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 32; “Coordination Perfect,” 30.

<sup>63</sup> See also “Coordination Perfect,” 30.

↳ *Gardens* explained, “Right at the store you play with your room arrangement on your own floor plan.”<sup>64</sup> The process of choosing and arranging furniture was referred to as *play*, and the housewife pictured in the article was seated on the floor, arranging the miniature models like a little girl playing with her toys (fig. 28). The text affirmed the magazine’s intention to portray her in this manner, exclaiming “It’s just like furnishing a dollhouse!” Dollhouses were viewed as feminine forms of play aimed at socialising girls and preparing them for their anticipated adult responsibilities as housewives. Further emphasizing her youthful and feminine appearance, the woman was dressed in fashionable garments that were associated with female childhood. Her blouse—with a jabot, ruffled sleeves, and scalloped edges—was a style that had been fashionable since the mid-1930s, described in women’s magazines as “feminine,” “frilly,” “delicate,” and “soft.”<sup>65</sup> A blouse in a 1940 issue of *Vogue* with comparable short, ruffled sleeves was even called a “little-girl blouse.”<sup>66</sup> Portraying the Flexible Home Arrangements housewife in this manner suggested that the multipurpose-modular concept provided her with a dose of nostalgia, levity, and fun.

In the scenarios portrayed in the publicity, the housewife’s in-store decorating activities were undertaken partly under male supervision. While the housewife was charged with mapping her floor plans on the grid paper at home, handling the miniature models in the store, and selecting the room arrangement, she needed a man to complete the task. At the retailer, a “salesman” would redraw her floors plans to the scale of the miniature models.<sup>67</sup> Measuring and scaling up the diagram aligned with normative male gender roles, as men were widely thought to be more suited to activities

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<sup>64</sup> Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 32.

<sup>65</sup> “One Suit + Some Blouses = Spring Chic,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, April 1935, 114; “Spring Suit and Chorus of Blouses,” *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1937, 67; “Ripple-Collared Suit and Blouses for Spring,” *Good Housekeeping*, March 1934, 54; “By Their Necklines Know the New Frocks,” *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1934, 108; “Paris Clothes from the Paris Openings,” *Good Housekeeping*, April 1934, 58; “Fashion: Spring Blouses for American Suits,” *Vogue*, 15 Feb. 1940, 98; “Fashion: Blouses Come into their Own,” *Vogue*, 15 March 1938, 149; “Fashion: Fine Weather for Suits,” *Vogue*, April 15, 1939, 95.

<sup>66</sup> “Fashion: Spring Blouses for American Suits,” 99.

<sup>67</sup> Holbrook, “Furniture Adventure,” 33.

involving mathematics and technical drawing. Only after the salesman scaled up her plans was the housewife ready to decorate. An illustration at the back of the W. & J. Sloane booklet showed a woman, holding her floor plan, next to a table of miniature models ready for her to use (fig. 29). Standing nearby, looking over her work, was a male salesperson. This method of shopping served to reassure the potential customer that she would have male support in the high-stakes process of buying new furniture and to subtly inform her that her decorating autonomy had limits. She got to “play” decorator and make decisions for her home, but under the watchful eye of a salesman there to advise and assist.

Similar gender roles were suggested in promotional photographs of the furniture models with a group of people known to be Eliel, Bob, Pipsan, Renzo Rutili, and Earl Johnson, president of Johnson. In one photograph, Bob, Pipsan, and Rutili posed next to miniature furniture models (fig. 30). If one were aware of Bob and Pipsan’s key roles in Flexible Home Arrangements, the photograph could be read as capturing the co-designers demonstrating the furniture concept: Pipsan led the demonstration, as she was the only one touching the furniture models. The presentation of the photographs in a *Detroit News* article, however, allowed room for an alternate interpretation. Nowhere did the article state that Pipsan and Bob were co-designers of the furniture; the article solely credited Eliel for the design of the line.<sup>68</sup> Pipsan therefore could be read as a similar figure to the housewife-decorator portrayed in the marketing and press, in an active yet circumscribed role. Her touching the furniture models could have been understood as a potential customer engaging in home decorating instead of a professional interior and furniture designer demonstrating her work and the concept behind it. In this scenario, instead of Bob and Rutili posing as colleagues, they could be interpreted as paternalistic male advisors—her husband and a salesman—there to guide the

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<sup>68</sup> Davies, “Cranbrook Designs Furniture.”

inquiring housewife-decorator, watching over her, one on each side of her, with their hands at the ready to help.

Another promotional photograph in the *Detroit News* article showed Eliel and Earl Johnson standing next to a miniature *Life* model home. The furniture was not even present in this photograph, yet this was the one selected to appear on the first page of the W. & J. Sloane booklet, in which the photograph of Pipsan, Bob, and Rutili was not included (fig. 13). By touching the house, Eliel was portrayed as an authority figure on the house, even though he did not design it. Posing with a model house was a fitting pose for an architect, more so in this case since Eliel's status as architect was central to the brand identity of Flexible Home Arrangements. The W. & J. Sloane booklet referred to him as the "world-famous architect" behind the line. *House Beautiful* elaborated on the benefits of having a successful architect design furniture:

The same straight thinking and feeling for form, material and the fitness of things that makes him a great architect have been applied to even such domestic things as we use in our houses every day. He has applied his talents to the creation of an almost universally adaptable series of furniture pieces integrated into a harmony of form and a multiplicity of use.<sup>69</sup>

The magazine clarified that the architect-designers, whose furniture promised logical "straight thinking and "fitness" to purpose, were male: "Modern minded men make this new sort of furniture which fits flawlessly into any house."<sup>70</sup> A similar promise was made in the W. & J. Sloane booklet. Under the heading "Designed by Architects" the booklet explained, "all of the models of this group have a brilliant background of studied development and exact knowledge of what is required for interiors of today." The phrases "studied development" and "exact knowledge" aimed to reassure readers that Flexible Home Arrangements was not a frivolous decorating scheme. (Male) architects imparted a logic, practicality, trustworthiness, and reliability to the furniture. The message was that the housewife-decorator might be given a limited amount of free reign within her interiors since

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<sup>69</sup> Kenneth K. Stowell, "To Talk of Many Things," *House Beautiful*, Sept. 1940, 25.

<sup>70</sup> "Coordination Perfect," 30.

control was built into the pieces by male designers and maintained by the man who helped the housewife make her purchase. The amateur female interior decorator worked within the confines established and upheld by men.

### Competition on the market and within the family

The degree to which Flexible Home Arrangements marketing and press succeeded in convincing consumers to buy the modern furniture cannot be gauged, nor can the commercial success of the line be evaluated since sales numbers do not survive. A steady flow of the furniture on to the vintage market today suggests that a large quantity was produced. Possibly related to the furniture's commercial success, Pipsan and Bob counted the line as one of their most significant career milestones for decades to come.<sup>71</sup> Their pride was probably also due to the favourable press coverage the line received and the fact that it was stocked by elite stores across the country.

For many years after the line's release, the Swansons boasted that it was the first line of "flexible," "modular" furniture on the market.<sup>72</sup> To be sure, it was not the first modular line of furniture on the market, nor the first line with pieces considered appropriate for a variety of room types. Since the first decade of the twentieth century, designers in the United States and Europe had been experimenting with modular furniture. In 1908, Bruno Paul designed unit bookcases and cabinets, and the following year, Sears, Roebuck & Company sold sectional bookcases in its catalogue. Marcel Breuer designed a system of modular components in 1924, and Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret exhibited modular furniture at the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern

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<sup>71</sup> "Local Tieup for Saarinen," *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 May 1947; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP; Hazel Trumble, "Pipsan Saarinen Swanson is Designer with Purpose," *Pontiac Daily Press* (MI), 3 Nov. 1950; Eveline Oen, "Theirs is a Life of 'Firsts'," *Birmingham Eccentric* (MI), 23 Aug. 1963; Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>72</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; Pipsan CV, ca. 1971; "Local Tieup for Saarinen"; Trumble, "Pipsan Saarinen Swanson is Designer with Purpose"; Oen, "Life of 'Firsts.'"

Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, which Eliel and Loja attended.<sup>73</sup>

In the mid-1930s, Gilbert Rohde and Russel Wright designed modular furniture lines that shared stylistic details and similar brand identities with Flexible Home Arrangements. Pipsan and Bob knew about these lines prior to releasing their own line: they had sought out the furniture in order to use it in Pipsan's interior decorating. In 1936, Bob wrote to Russel Wright because Pipsan was interested in purchasing his American Modern line of furniture to use in her interiors (fig. 31).<sup>74</sup> Made of natural-grain maple wood with horizontal drawer pulls, the line was designed with flexibility in mind: it had over fifty pieces, some of which were promoted as multifunctional-modular pieces that could stand alone or be grouped together.<sup>75</sup> Wright intended for the furniture to be used in various rooms of a house, and pieces were publicized in model rooms done in various styles, from traditional to modern.<sup>76</sup> Catalogues, advertisements, and other sales materials for Wright's furniture also associated the products with American-ness. Fittingly named "American Modern," the line was claimed to have been inspired by the simplicity and honesty of Colonial American design.<sup>77</sup> Marketing noted that maple was "the wood of our forefathers" and that Conant Ball, the line's manufacturer, was an old New England company; the combination of materials and construction resulted in a quality that matched that of handcrafted Colonial American furniture.<sup>78</sup> As such, items in the Wright-designed line were promised to be as long lasting as American antiques and one day

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<sup>73</sup> Wittkopp, *Saarinens House*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Bob to Russel Wright, 10 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP; Russel Wright to Bob, 13 Jan. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP.

<sup>75</sup> Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 30-31.

<sup>76</sup> Shapiro, "A Man and His Manners," 31; Donald Albrecht, "From Hollywood to Walden Pond: Stage Sets for American Living," in *Russel Wright*, 95; Robert Schonfeld, "Marketing Easier Living: The Commodification of Russel Wright," in *Russel Wright*, 145.

<sup>77</sup> Donald Albrecht and Robert Schonfeld, "Introduction," in *Russel Wright*, 17; Shapiro, "A Man and His Manners," 31.

<sup>78</sup> Schonfeld, "Marketing Easier Living," 145.



would become heirlooms themselves.<sup>79</sup> The American Modern line was pitched as the newest stage in a long history of American furniture traditions.<sup>80</sup>

Pipsan must also have been familiar with Gilbert Rohde's modular furniture because Rohde-designed pieces she used in her interiors in 1936 to 1937 were from lines that also included modular units.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the 1930s, Rohde designed multifunctional and modular modern furniture for a number of manufacturers, beginning with Heywood-Wakefield in 1931 with Herman Miller in 1932. The Herman Miller 3319 group from 1933, the Laurel line from 1934, and the 3630 group from 1936 all resembled Flexible Home Arrangements (figs. 32-34). Rohde designed the modular case pieces of his lines to look like built-in furniture.<sup>82</sup> They had box-like forms, with the main compartments raised on recessed platforms of a darker wood. Additionally, Rohde's designs were marketed using miniature models of the furniture designs placed in retail stores that stocked the line.<sup>83</sup>

The Swansons' claim that Flexible Home Arrangements was the first flexible, modular furniture line on the market was not their only specious claim about their accomplishments. Pipsan maintained that she was "reasonably sure" they were the first architecture office in the country to have a modern interior design office within it.<sup>84</sup> Bob took credit for introducing Walter Gropius to Harvard Dean Joseph Hudnut, implying that he played a role in the former Bauhaus director becoming the Chair of the university's architecture department, a tenure widely credited for helping bring the International Style to the United States.<sup>85</sup> Both Bob and Pipsan claimed that the mass-

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<sup>79</sup> Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 44.

<sup>80</sup> Schonfeld, "Marketing Easier Living," 145; Albrecht, "From Hollywood to Walden Pond," 95; Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 45.

<sup>81</sup> Rohde-designed furniture is pictured in chapter 3 (figs. 20-22, 26) are pictured in Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 112, 118, 138, 142.

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 32; Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 114.

<sup>83</sup> Ross, *Gilbert Rohde*, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Pipsan to Ann Stacy, Executive Director, Michigan Society of Architects, 29 July 1969, box 7, folder 8, SP; Oen, "Life of 'Firsts.'"

<sup>85</sup> Bob, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 7 Feb. 1980, box 4, tape 203, COHI.

produced line they designed after Flexible Home Arrangements, the Saarinen-Swanson Group (released 1947), was “the first co-ordinated set of interior ‘decorations’ (from rugs and furniture to glassware and lamps).”<sup>86</sup> For this line, Pipsan and Bob engaged other well-known designers to work on various parts of the line. This again was something that Russel Wright had done years earlier, in 1939, with his “American Way” project, for which Wright brought together the work of over seventy designers in an extensive, coordinated line of home furnishings.<sup>87</sup> One of the participating designers was Marianne Strengell, a close friend of Pipsan’s who also participated in the Saarinen-Swanson Group.<sup>88</sup>

The hyperbole riddled throughout the Swansons’ professional narrative could be read as them merely playing the game: doing what was necessary to drum up appeal for themselves and their work. In the 1920s, when Bob came of age professionally, American businesses placed great faith in the power of marketing and its critical role in selling products, and this was true of the Depression era too. As an American male matured in this culture, Bob may have been so immersed in this entrepreneurial mentality, compounded by the pressures imposed by the Depression, that he had no qualms about exaggerating the contribution of Flexible Home Arrangements to the field of design. In fact, he may have viewed Flexible Home Arrangements from a marketing perspective first and foremost. In July 1940, the month after the line debuted, evidently pleased with the initial response, he wrote to a Johnson representative: “Everyone is very favorably impressed with the new furniture. I am sure you are glad that you stepped out and sponsored a new idea in furniture merchandising.”<sup>89</sup> Notably, he wrote that it was a new idea in furniture *merchandising*, not a new idea in furniture design. He probably felt that simply adding a well-designed, high-quality line of multipurpose-modular

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<sup>86</sup> Oen, “Life of ‘Firsts.’”

<sup>87</sup> Schonfeld, “Marketing Easier Living,” 156-59.

<sup>88</sup> “Group to Push Art in Lines for Home,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1940; See chapter 4.

<sup>89</sup> Bob to Barry Stuart, Executive, Johnson Furniture Co., 11 July 1940, box 12, folder 7, SAR.

furniture to a market with comparable offerings was not enough. In other ways, Bob had demonstrated his faith in business and marketing: by trying to act as the Saarinen's manager, by securing patents on Eliel's work, and by capitalizing on Eliel's fame.<sup>90</sup> It is also possible that Bob, and perhaps Pipsan too, suffered from feelings of inferiority. The accomplishments of Pipsan's father were hard to live up to. Moreover, many of the Swansons' opportunities had been obtained through their connection to Eliel. The claims for various firsts can be interpreted as the Swansons attempt to distinguish themselves from Eliel and establish their own reputation, at the mere cost of doing what every other marketing firm in America did without a second thought.

### Conclusion

The Flexible Home Arrangements brand identity, developed to sell the products to consumers, was far removed from Pipsan's interiors in which she used the furniture. Unlike the customer targeted in the marketing, Pipsan's clients' homes were not furnished by a housewife-decorator, but by Pipsan, a professional designer, and were thoroughly modern in style, influenced by Finnish modernists. Yet, Pipsan's modern interior design style had a limited following in the United States, criticized as being a fad that was out of tune with American ways of life. Marketing the line in a manner that reflected how Pipsan used the furniture in her interiors would do little to persuade consumers otherwise.

Although when the line was released the economy was stronger than it had been in ten years, boding well for a potential market, the start of World War II aggravated certain anxieties in the United States. The threat of fascism and communism encouraged many to double down on their devotion to American democracy and also seek to define the values that united Americans in such uncertain times. Speaking to this moment, Flexible Home Arrangements was presented to the public as products that were rooted in the American past, harmonized with decorating styles widely

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<sup>90</sup> See chapter 1.

understood as American, upheld traditional gender roles, but also allowed Americans to live in more modern ways. The marketing conveyed that buying and living with this modern furniture did not necessitate rejecting the past or abandoning traditions. Rather, the furniture was in many ways—socially, economically, politically, and culturally—attuned to the American present.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. Flexible Home Arrangements chest, desk/vanity, bench, and bookshelf, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The furniture was styled in a room with naturalistic floral-patterned wallpaper.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 2. Flexible Home Arrangements cabinets, chest, table, and chairs, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The chairs were upholstered with floral-patterned upholstery.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 3. Flexible Home Arrangements bar buffet and chairs, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The furniture was styled with a naturalistic flower painting,

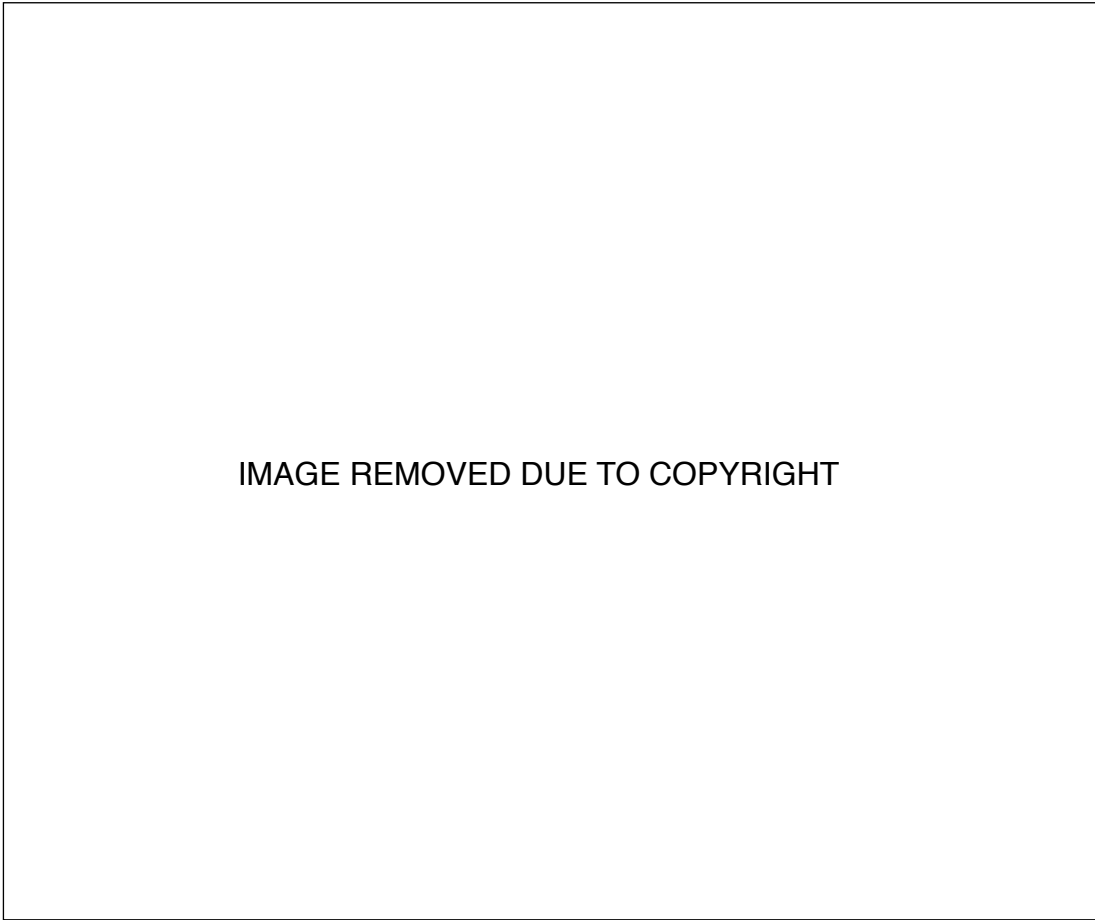


Figure 4. Flexible Home Arrangements table, chairs, cabinets, and chests, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). Neoclassical vases were placed on top of the chests.





IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 5. Flexible Home Arrangements chests and table, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The furniture was styled in a room with wallpaper printed with Neoclassical harps and silhouette portraits as well as a rug that recalled Colonial braided rag rugs.

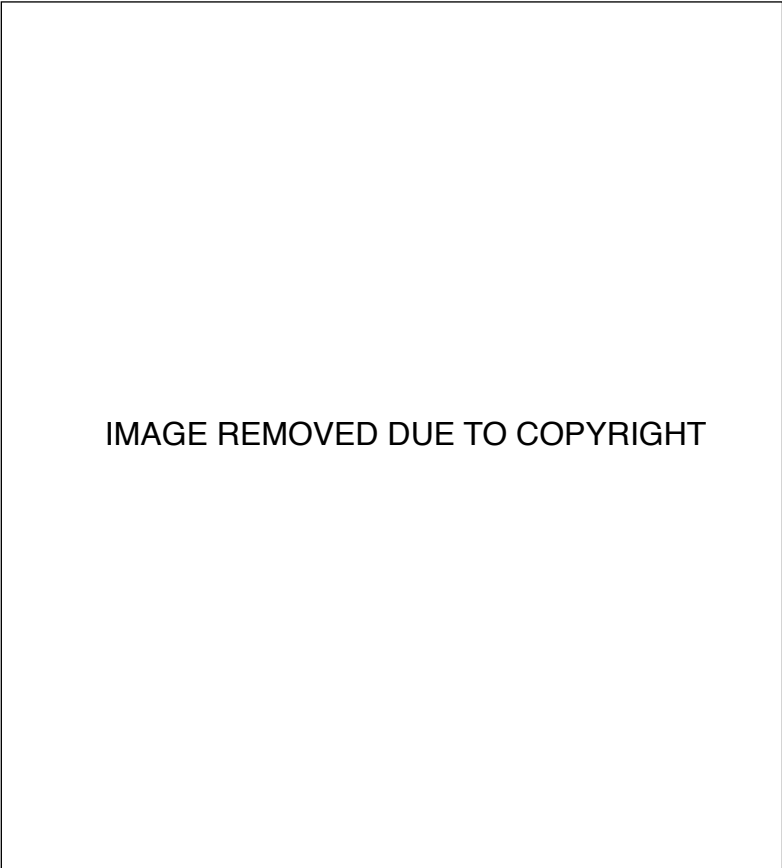


Figure 6. Flexible Home Arrangements nesting tables and coffee table, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The furniture was styled in a room with an eighteenth-century-style wall clock.

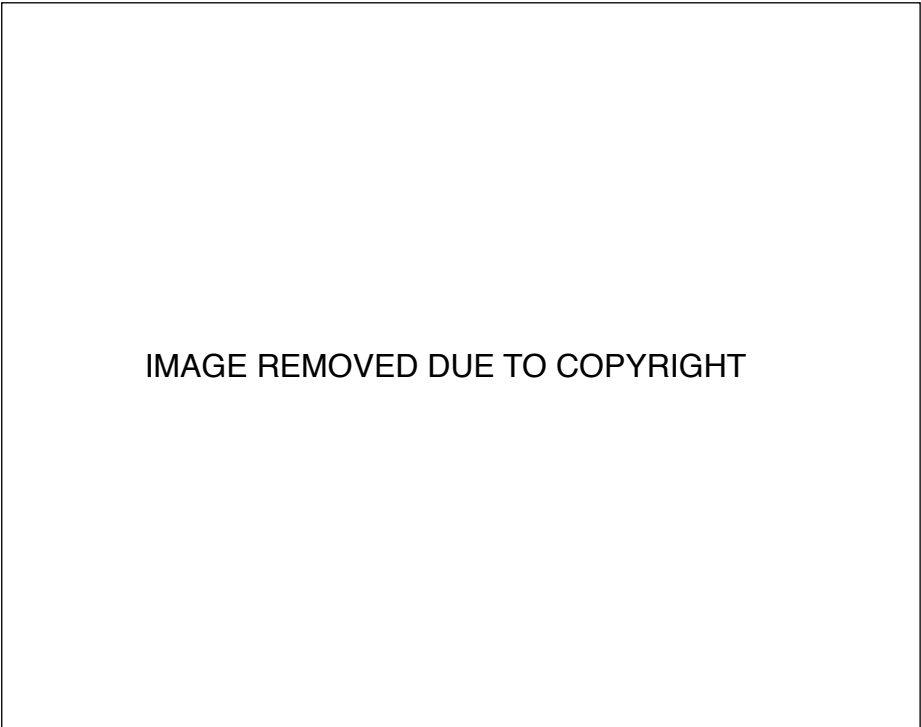


Figure 7. Flexible Home Arrangements end table and coffee table, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.). The furniture was styled in a room with naturalistic floral-patterned wallpaper.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 8. Closeup of John Stuart advertisement for Flexible Home Arrangements (*Interiors* 103, no. 9, April 1944, 20). In the top left illustration, the furniture was depicted in a room with a pair of silhouette portraits, an oval rag rug, lighting fixtures in the style of glass oil lamps, and a shelf clock. In the bottom right room, the furniture was styled with a Neoclassical lyre wall hanging, eagle-patterned wallpaper, and Neoclassical swags—on the window valance and chair skirt.



Figure 9. Federal Housing Administration booklet cover with “FHA” graphic, 1935 (Columbia University website, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsappprojs/call-it-home/html/chapter1.2.html>)

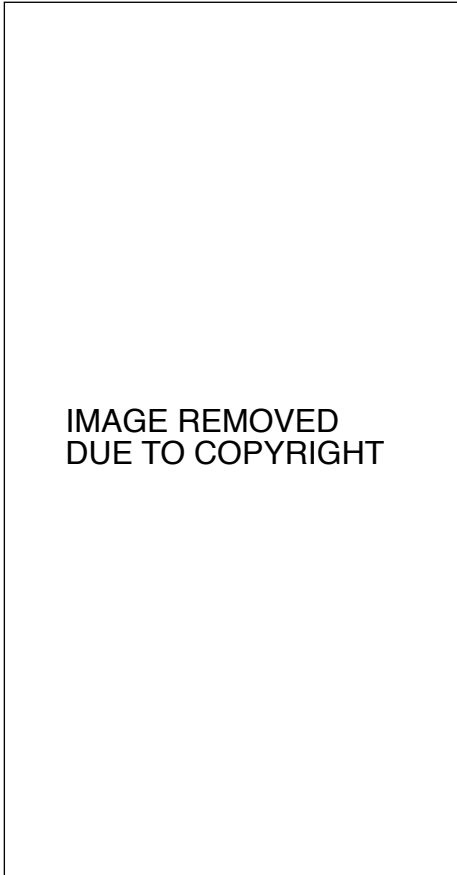


Figure 10. Federal Housing Administration brochure cover with “FHA” graphic, 1935 (Columbia University website, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsappprojs/call-it-home/html/chapter1.2.html>)

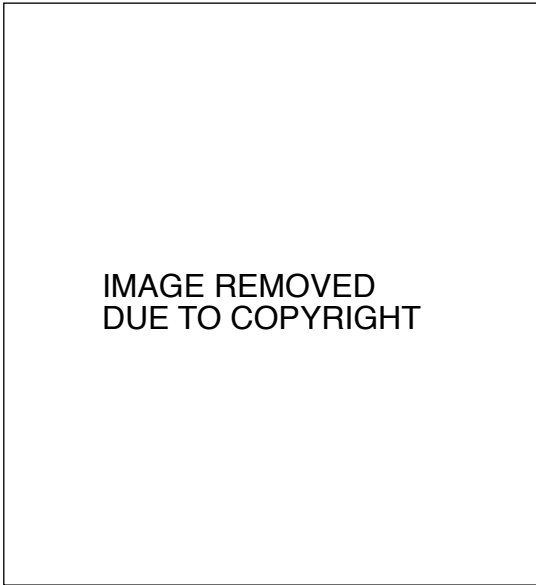


Figure 11. Flexible Home Arrangements “FHA” brand on the back of a chest (Grand Rapids Public Museum website, 1992.33.2)

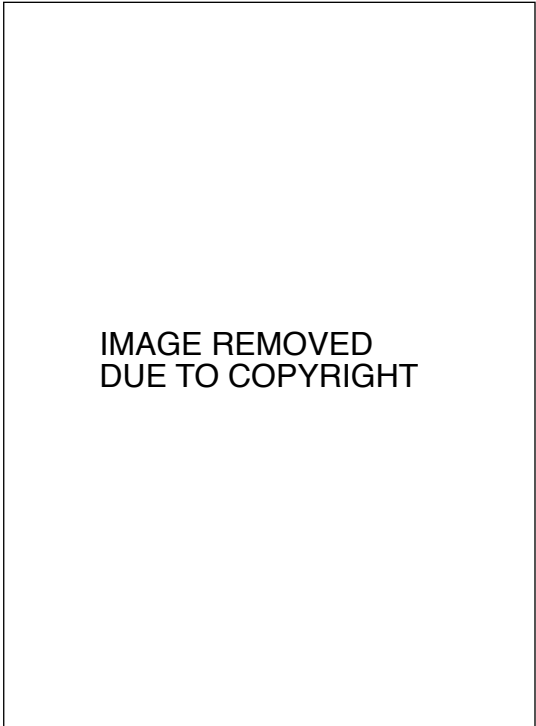


Figure 12. Cover of W. & J. Sloane booklet, undated

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 13. Top: Eliel and the President of Johnson with a miniature *Life* model home (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

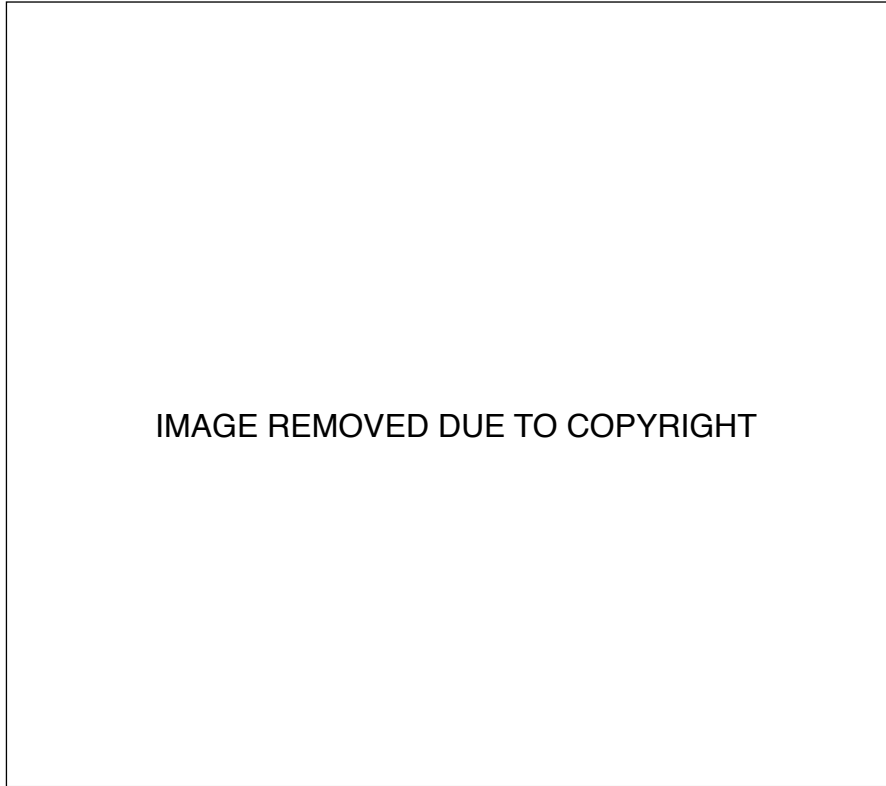


Figure 14. Bedroom furniture, designed by Alvar Aalto and Aino Marsio-Aalto, in their home, completed 1936, Helsinki, Finland (photograph by the author)

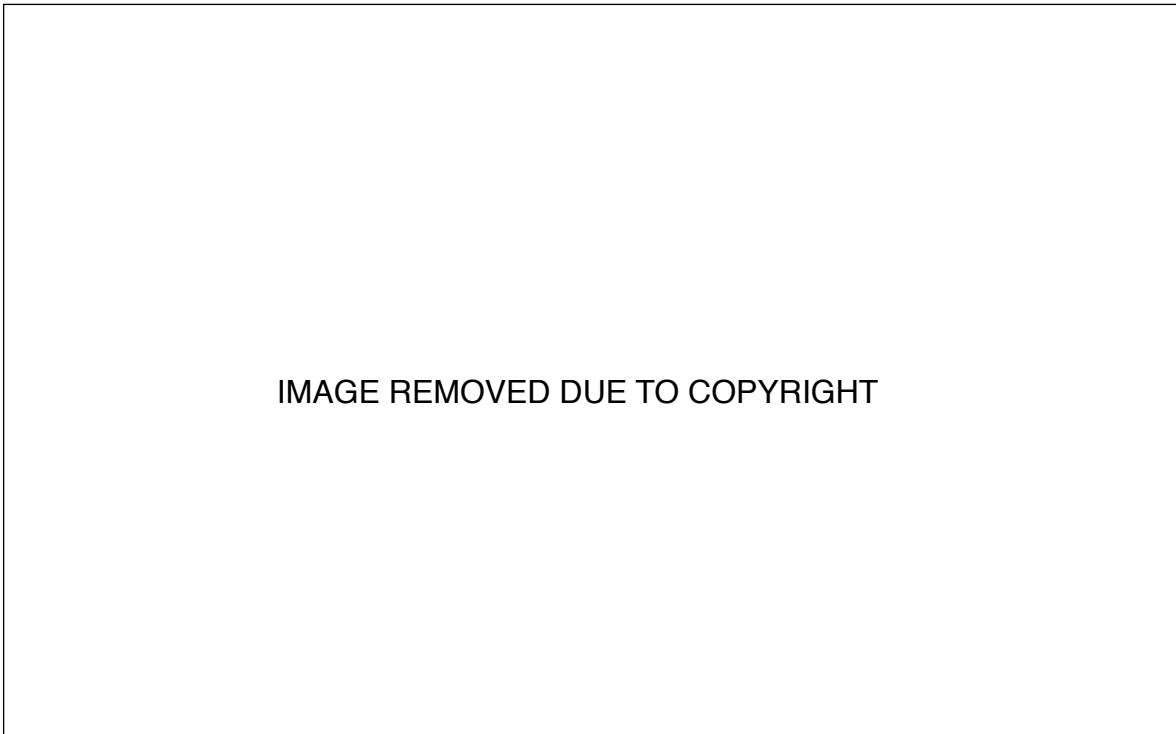


Figure 15. Desk, designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto and manufactured by Artek, ca. 1938 (Kellein, *Alvar & Aino Aalto. Design: Collection Bischofberger*, 132-33)

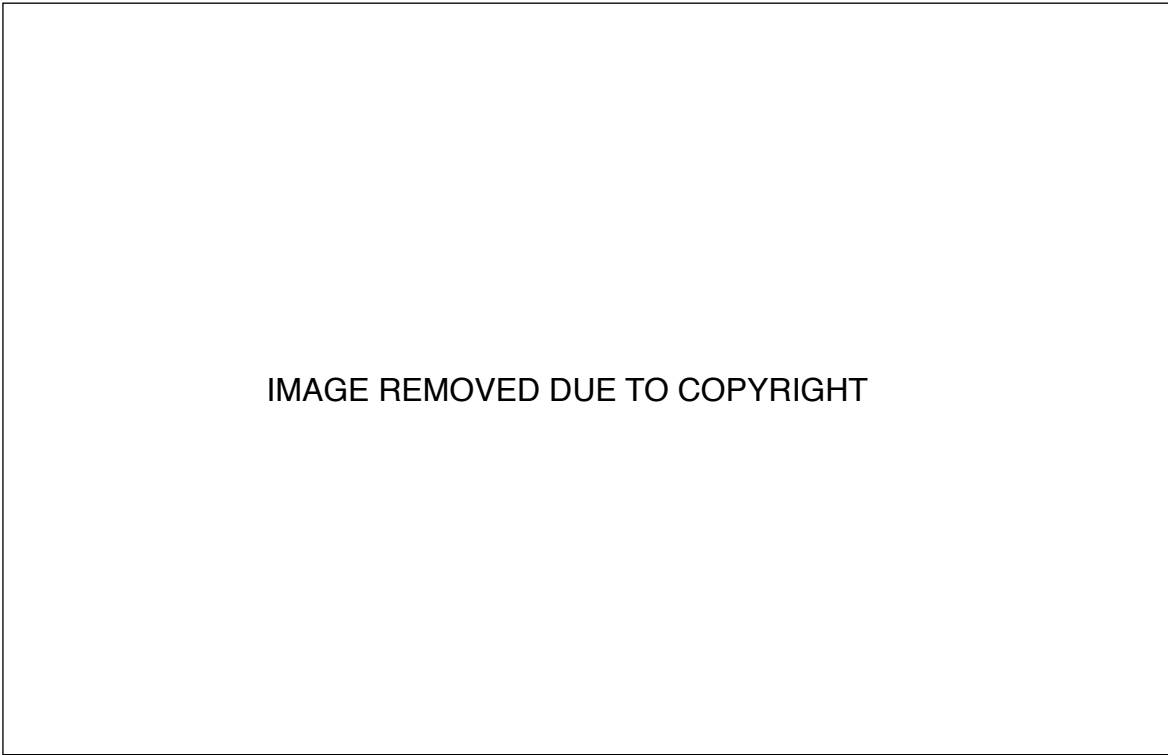


Figure 16. Flexible Home Arrangements nesting tables, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (Phillips auction house website)



Figure 17. Flexible Home Arrangements bench, designed by Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel, released 1940 (undated W. & J. Sloane booklet, n.p.)

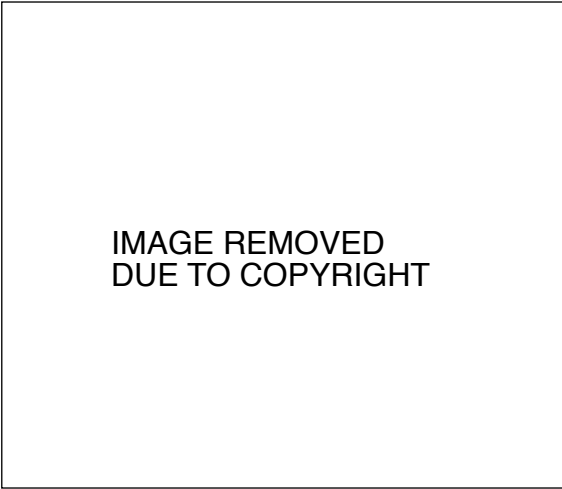


Figure 18. Paimio Chair, designed by Alvar Aalto, 1931-1932 (Museum of Modern Art website, 710.1943.1)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 19. Eden residence, designed by Bob, completed 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 20. Villa Mairea, designed by Alvar Aalto and Aino Marsio-Aalto, completed 1939, Noormarkku, Finland (photograph by the author)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 21. Eden residence hall, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 22. Eden residence dining room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The chairs were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.

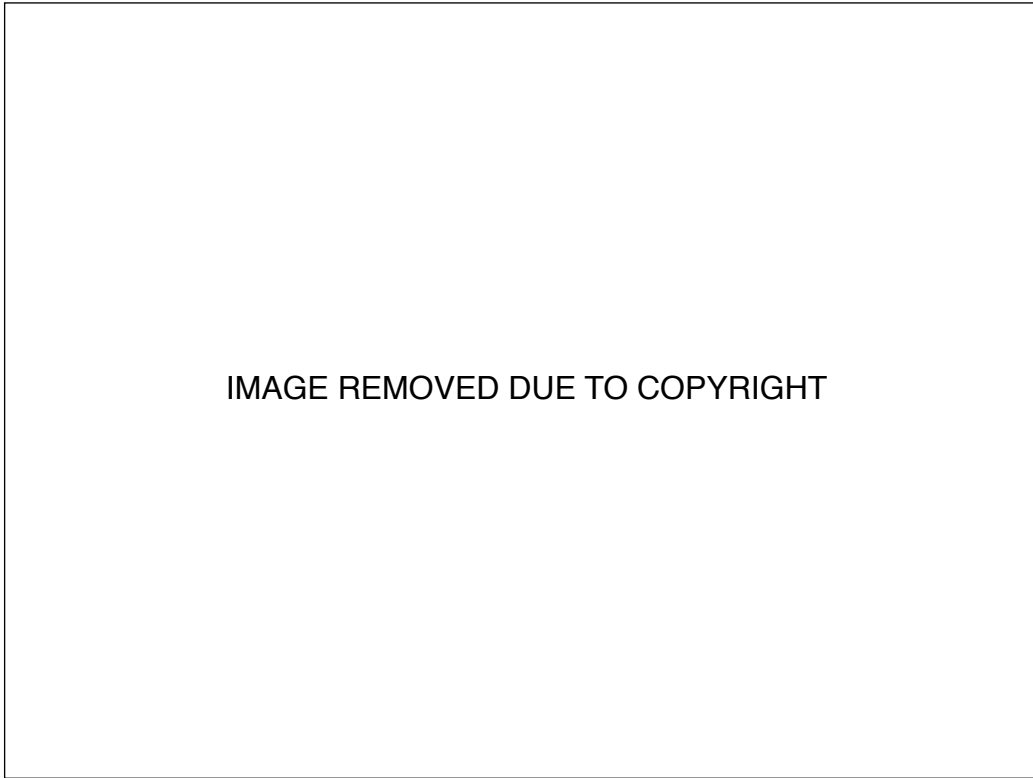


Figure 23. Eden residence living and dining rooms, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The coffee table was from the Flexible Home Arrangements line.

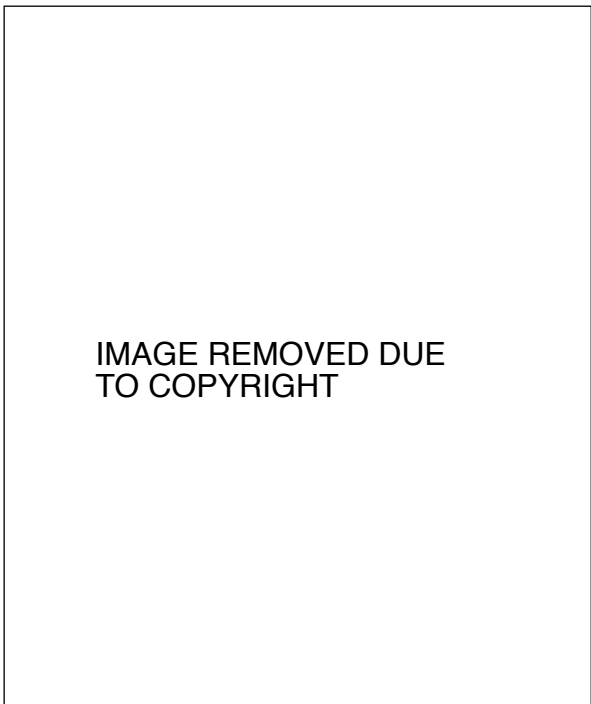


Figure 24. Closeup of the amoeboid-print curtain and pillow fabric in figure 23

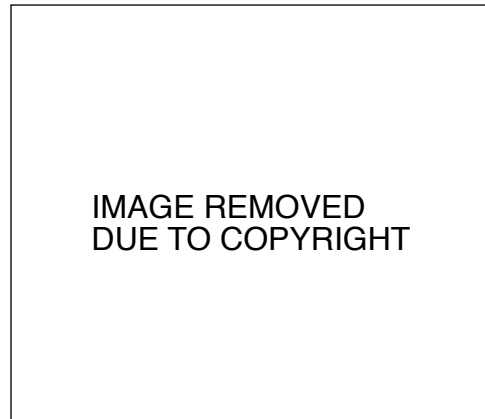


Figure 25. Closeup of ameobid glassware in figure 23



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 26. Eden residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The desk/dresser was from the Flexible Home Arrangements line. The chair was designed by Gilbert Rohde (see Davies, *At Home in Manhattan*, 110).



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 27. MacDonal efficiency apartments, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1941-1942, Harbor Springs, Michigan (Cranbrook Kitchen Sink Blog). The chests at left were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line. The chairs and table were designed by Alvar Aalto.

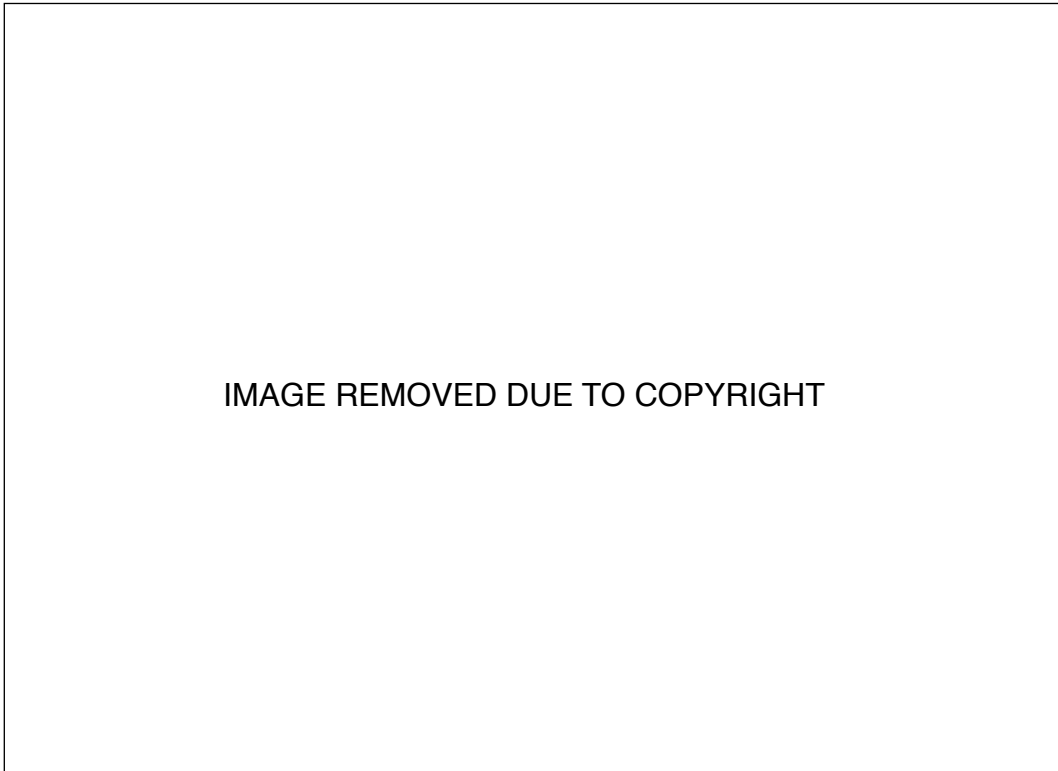


Figure 28. Flexible Home Arrangements feature article (*Better Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1940, 32)

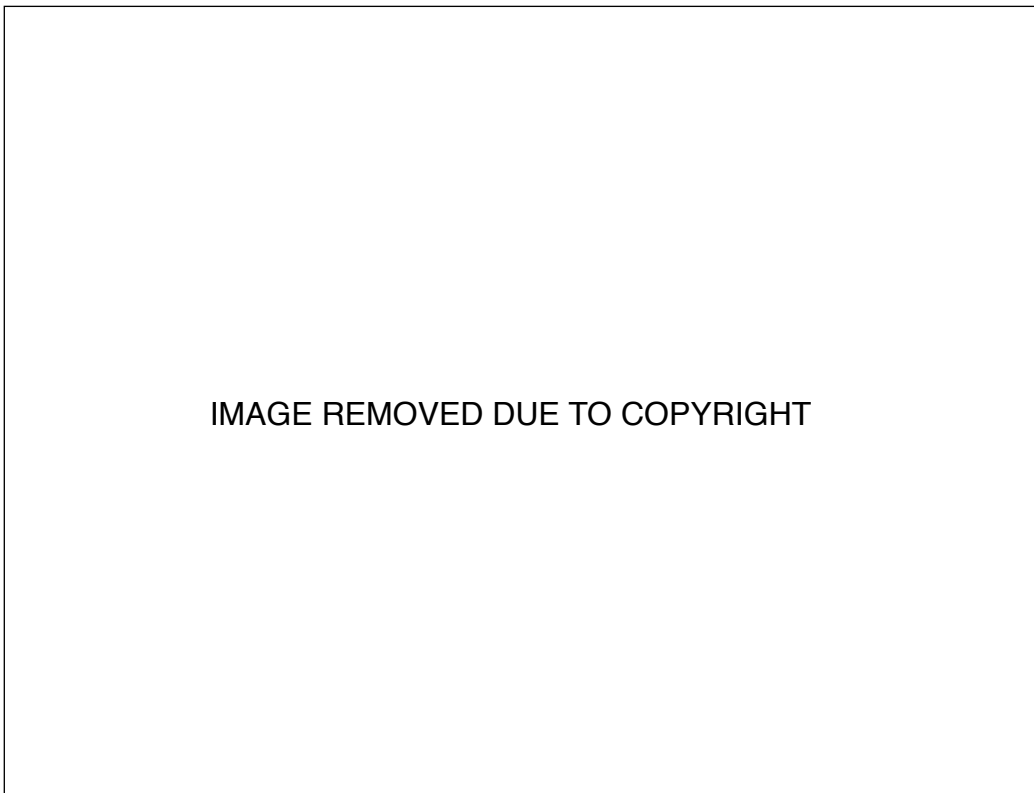


Figure 29. Flexible Home Arrangements W. & J. Sloane booklet (undated, n.p.)

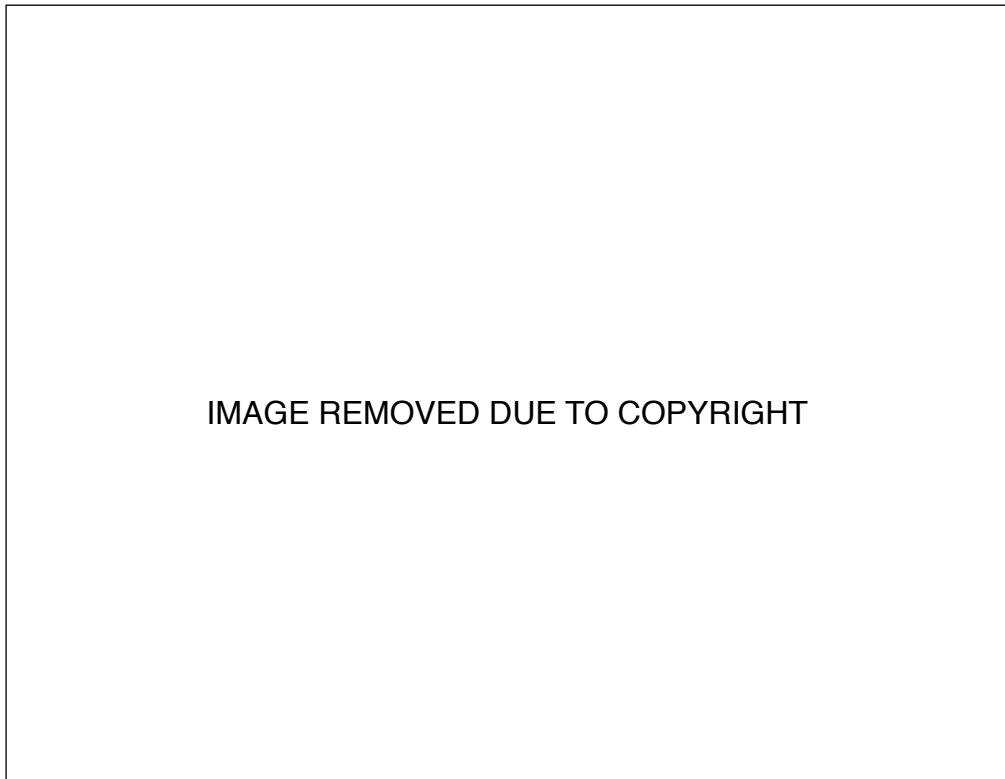


Figure 30. Bob, Pipsan, and Renzo Rutili, pictured in an article on Flexible Home Arrangements in the *Detroit News* (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

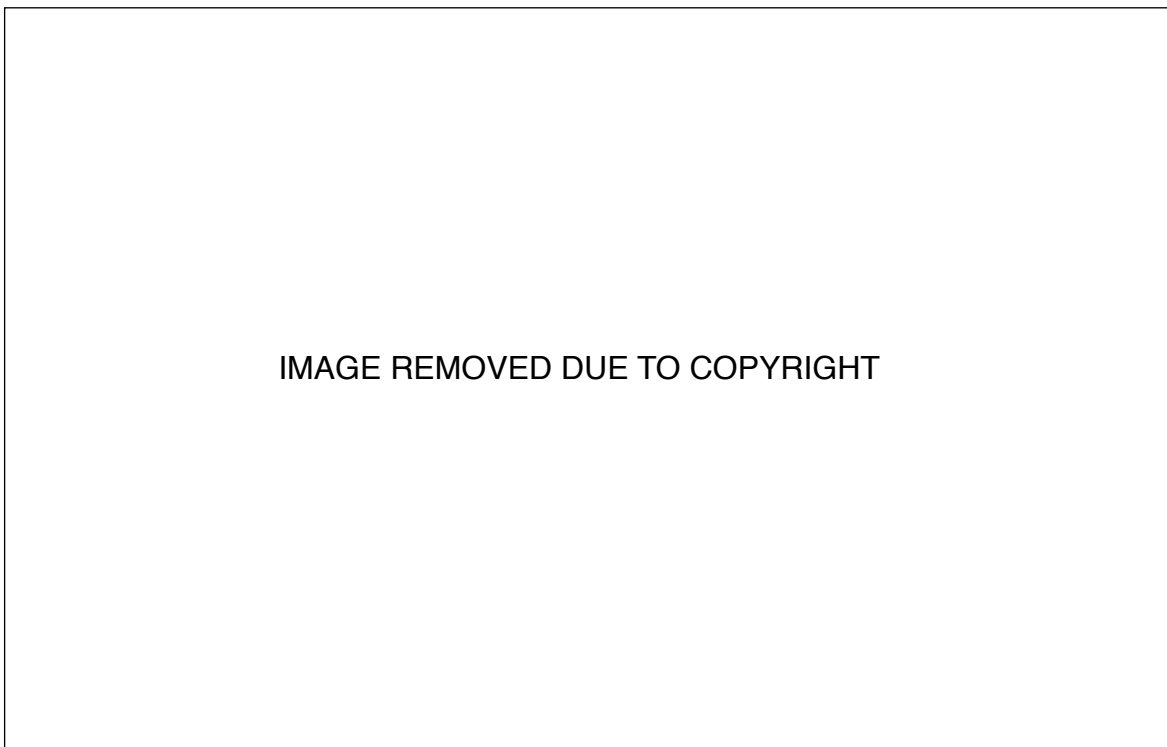


Figure 31. Furniture from the American Modern line, designed by Russel Wright, 1935 (Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 30)

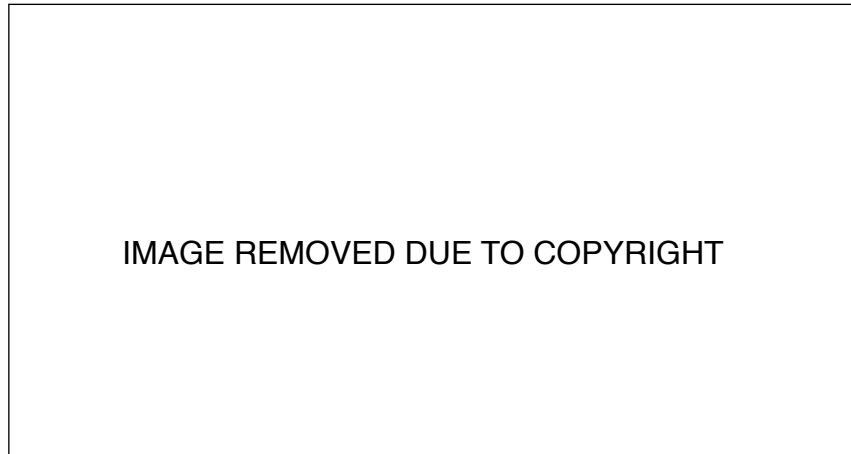


Figure 32. Furniture from the 3319 Group, designed by Gilbert Rohde, 1933 (Wayne State University Libraries Digital Collections)

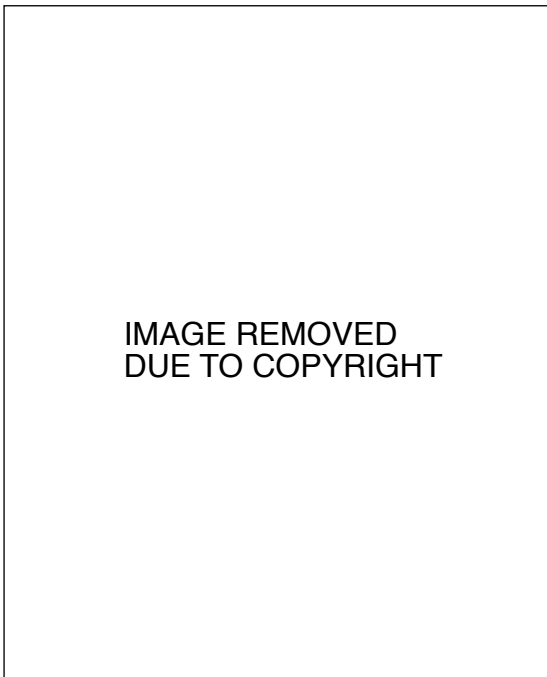


Figure 33. Furniture from the Laurel line, designed by Gilbert Rohde, 1934 (Wilson, *Livable Modernism*, 33)

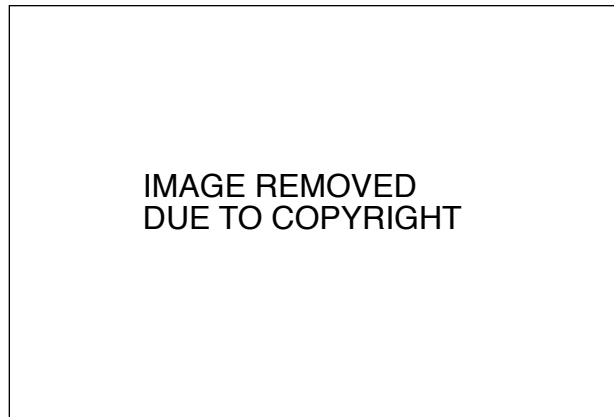


Figure 34. Furniture from the 3630 Group, designed by Gilbert Rohde, 1936 (Wayne State University Libraries Digital Collections)

**PART III: The Saarinen-Swanson Group (released 1947)**

## Chapter 5: An Extensive Line of Modern Home Furnishings

Released in 1947, the Saarinen-Swanson Group comprised furniture, textiles, glassware, metalware, lamps, ceramics, and decorative objects designed by Pipsan and Bob as well as Marianne Strengell, Lydia Winston, Charles Dusenbury, and Benjamin Baldwin. Pipsan's and Bob's personal-work relationships impacted who was (and was not) involved in designing the mass-produced line. Participating designers contributed either expertise, connections with manufacturers, and/or marketable reputations to help the Swansons get the line designed, manufactured, and publicized. The furnishings aligned with Pipsan's established interior design style, and through the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Pipsan expanded the scope of her design work into mass-produced printed textiles, glassware, metalware, and lamps—during the challenging years immediately after World War II, no less.

### World War II and reconversion

Pipsan explained that, after Flexible Home Arrangements was completed in 1940, she found that the line alone “was not enough. It was still hard to find complementary items to go with the furniture” to complete her interiors.<sup>1</sup> As was the case with furniture, custom textiles and other furnishings were too expensive for many clients. This inspired the Swansons to begin developing “a completely coordinated group of fabrics, rugs, lamps and accessories,” as well as more furniture for Pipsan to use in her interiors and to market and sell to the public.<sup>2</sup> Their plans, however, were postponed by World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>2</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1948], box 8, folder 11, SP; Bob, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 7 Feb. 1980, box 4, tape 203, COHI.



Even before the country entered the war in December 1941, the United States geared the economy and industry towards defence production in effort to secure victory over the Axis powers. Focusing on military production delayed the development and manufacture of new home furnishings.<sup>3</sup> Numerous materials were either only available in limited quantities or altogether prohibited for civilian production in order to prioritize goods needed for the war effort. Metals, including steel and aluminium, were needed to make weapons and military vehicles; lumber was funnelled into housing construction for defence workers who came to live near war production plants; and cotton was needed to make agricultural bags, military tents, and tire cording.<sup>4</sup> Factories that had produced home furnishings converted to make defence products. For example, Johnson, the manufacturer of Flexible Home Arrangements, produced a part for the Stinson Bomber aircraft.<sup>5</sup> Many designers and architects either joined the armed forces or worked on war production. Eliel, Bob, and Eero designed defence buildings.<sup>6</sup> Bob also served as a member of the Michigan Society of Architects Small House Committee, a war consultant to the Bloomfield Hills City Plan Commission, and a Disaster Chairman for the Red Cross.<sup>7</sup>

Pipsan is not known to have worked for the war effort. Before the war, the focus of her work was Flexible Home Arrangements, interior design, and the design of custom textiles woven at

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<sup>3</sup> Leo M. Cherne, *Your Business Goes to War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Lumber refers to wood that has been roughly processed into boards or planks to be used in building construction as well as carcasses for veneered case furniture; Robert Friedel, "Scarcity and Promise: Materials and American Domestic Culture during World War II," in *World War II and the American Dream: How Wartime Building Changed a Nation*, eds. Donald Albrecht and Margaret Crawford (Washington DC: National Building Museum, 1995), 69-70; Civilian Production Administration, *Minutes of the War Production Board: January 20, 1942 to October 9, 1945* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), 200, 336; "Restriction Placed on Better Cotton," *New York Times*, 23 July 1942.

<sup>5</sup> "Johnson Furniture Company History," Grand Rapid Public Museum website. <https://www.grpmcollections.org/index.php/Detail/entities/3085>. Accessed 17 May 2022. Johnson Furniture Co. produced the aircraft part from 1942 to 1945. It continued to produce Flexible Home Arrangements during the war, at least to a degree. By April 1942, the furniture pieces were still in production except for the tables with steel tabletops. Johnson had used up their stock of the steel tabletops and new ones were "impossible to obtain." Barry Stuart, Executive, Johnson Furniture Co., to Pipsan, 10 April 1942, box 11, folder 16, SAR.

<sup>6</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 139.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson Associates to Ted Seymour, Michigan Society of Architects employee, 7 June 1954, box 7, folder 8, SP; Bob to John C. Thornton, President, Michigan Society of Architects, 15 Sept. 1943, box 1, folder 1, SAR.

Studio Loja Saarinen.<sup>8</sup> Pipsan and Bob's joint work designing high-end homes would have come to a halt during the war. As of 1942, residential remodelling and construction exceeding \$200 within a twelve-month period was prohibited unless it was done to support the war effort (i.e., to build defence housing).<sup>9</sup> Pipsan, however, was able to continue her independent interior design work since home furnishings were still available, even if in limited quantities. She completed approximately ten interiors while wartime restrictions were in place.<sup>10</sup> Given the rampant material restrictions, the war years were no time to develop mass-produced furnishings.

Victory for the Allied powers was secured on the European front in May 1945 and on the Pacific front in August 1945, at which point the government immediately ended defence production and began reconvertng to civilian manufacture.<sup>11</sup> Many consumers were able and eager to spend on new products for their homes because war production had strengthened the economy, and consumer rationing (except for sugar) ended in 1945, yet it took some time for supply to catch up with demand. Factories had to be refitted and reorganized, and companies had to obtain raw materials, an impediment that continued well after the war ended for many industries. Many home furnishing materials, including textiles, lumber, metals, clay, and glass, were all either in short supply and/or restricted by the government through 1946 and, in some cases, into 1947.<sup>12</sup> If a material was

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<sup>8</sup> See chapters 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> "The Record Reports," *Architectural Record* 92, no. 4 (Oct. 1942): 7; Celotex Corporation, *A Wartime Guide to Better Homes* (Chicago: Celotex Corporation, 1944), 5-6; "The Record Reports," *Architectural Record* 96, no. 4 (Oct. 1944): 10; "WPB May Change L-41 To Ease Repair Work," *New York Times*, 9 Jan. 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948; See also box 10, folder 23, box 11, folders 7-9 and 16, and box 12, folders 5 and 15, SAR.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1948* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1949), 785.

<sup>12</sup> "For Your Information," *Interiors* 105, no. 1 (Aug. 1945): 104-5; "WPB Yields Role to Peace Agency," *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1945; John D. Small and the Civilian Production Administration, *Monthly Report on Civilian Production*, 27 Dec. 1945, 26 June 1946, and Jan.-Nov. 1946; Lee E. Cooper, "Priority Ratings Start on Tuesday to Speed Housing," *New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1946; "Supply Situation," *Interiors* 105, no. 7 (Feb. 1946): 118; See "The Record Reports" columns in *Architectural Record* 99, no. 2 (Feb. 1946): 10; 99, no. 5 (May 1946): 10, 18; 99, no. 6 (June 1946): 7, 12; 100, no. 2 (Aug. 1946): 10; 100, no. 5 (Nov. 1946): 7; and 100, no. 6 (Dec. 1946): 10, 13; "Supply Situation," *Interiors* 106, no. 3 (Oct. 1946): 20; "Fine Stuffs," *Interiors* 106, no. 3 (Oct. 1946): 104; John D. Small and the Civilian Production Administration, *From War to Peace: Civilian Production Achievements in Transition*, 6 Dec. 1946; Civilian Production Administration, *Production Outlook: 1947*, 32-33.

in short supply, the government typically stepped in and imposed restrictions on it so as to limit usage, expand production, inhibit accumulation, break bottlenecks, and facilitate relief. Shortages and delayed production were either caused or compounded by a shortage of industrial workers and/or labour strikes in many industries, including coal, steel, plastics, glass, and soda ash, a material required to produce ceramics, glassware, and aluminium.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, consumer demand for home furnishing products remained unfulfilled in 1946.<sup>14</sup> During the course of 1947, furnishings industries began to resemble normal production rates and a significant number of new lines were available for purchase.<sup>15</sup>

In 1946, the Swansons resumed work on the home furnishings line they began envisioning earlier in the decade.<sup>16</sup> They co-designed the furniture; Pipsan designed lamps, glassware, printed upholstery and curtain textiles, and a metal vase; and Bob designed metalware (figs. 1-8). Because the task of creating an extensive line of furnishings was such a large undertaking, the Swansons enlisted the help of individuals associated with the Cranbrook Academy of Art to work on select product categories.<sup>17</sup> Finnish designer Marianne Strengell designed upholstery textiles, bedspreads, and table linens, and she also chose the colours for the rugs and carpets.<sup>18</sup> Strengell had come to Cranbrook in

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<sup>13</sup> Small and Civilian Production Administration, *Monthly Report on Civilian Production*, 27 Dec. 1945, 27 March 1946, 26 June 1946, and 26 Nov. 1946; Civilian Production Administration, *Production Outlook 1947*, Feb. 1947, 11, 27, 35, 36, 41, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Civilian Production Administration, *Monthly Report on Civilian Production*, 29 July 1946, 17; *The Economic Report of the President: To the Congress, January 8, 1947* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1947), 11-12, 19.

<sup>15</sup> "Rugs, Carpets, You Can Buy Now," *Interiors* 106, no. 11 (June 1947): 116; "Industry Predicts 1947 Costs, Output," *Journal of the American Ceramic Society* 30, no. 3 (March 1947): 78; "Available Now: The Best Furniture in Years," *Interiors* 106, no. 8 (March 1947): 76; "Industrial Trends and Prospects for 1947," *Journal of the American Ceramic Society* 30, no. 4 (April 1947): 94; "Market Retrospect," *Interiors* 107, no. 1 (Aug. 1947): 10; "1947: Design Year in the U.S.A." *House & Garden*, July 1947, 26-40; "The Good Word on Fabrics," *Interiors* 107, no. 4 (Nov. 1947): 101. By January 1947, most of the government restrictions on the building and textile industries had been lifted. The glass and ceramics industries anticipated falling short of demand for at least part of the year. In March 1947, *Interiors* proclaimed, "the furniture industry is waking up!" and in July, *House & Garden* reported that for the first time since 1941 "significant collections of new furniture and fabrics are for sale in shops across the U.S.A." Despite the lifting of restrictions, the textile industry continued to struggle well into 1947, with rugs and carpets the slowest to rebound to normal production. *Interiors* reported in November that furnishing fabrics were finally readily available in stores.

<sup>16</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948.

<sup>17</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1948.

<sup>18</sup> "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group at the Johnson Furniture co. Showroom, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Given by Margot Schuyler, Administrative Co-ordinator [sic]," script, 5 June 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP.

1937 to teach textiles and in 1942 became head of the weaving department.<sup>19</sup> Lydia Winston designed ceramic dinnerware, vases, ashtrays, and decorative vessels. Daughter of Albert Kahn, Winston had earned a degree in ceramics and painting from Cranbrook in 1944.<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Baldwin, an architect-designer who studied at Cranbrook and worked in the Saarinen architecture office in the late 1930s, worked on lamps alongside Pipsan, although he may have only designed two lamps.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, sculptor and Cranbrook alumnus Charles Dusenbury contributed ceramic sculptures.<sup>22</sup> The Swansons planned for him to serially produce them to stock stores, yet he appears to have only made one or two pieces used in model rooms.<sup>23</sup> To help unify the disparate furnishings, Pipsan coordinated the overall colour palette.<sup>24</sup> After working with sixteen manufacturers to realize the various products, the Saarinen-Swanson Group was unveiled in June 1947 to a group of buyers at the Johnson showroom in model rooms designed by Pipsan, and the next month it was shown at the Grand Rapids Summer Furniture Market.<sup>25</sup> Of the products displayed in Grand Rapids as well as at the July American Furniture Mart and Merchandise Mart in Chicago, *Interiors* opined that the Saarinen-Swanson Group aroused “the greatest interest of any new line of furniture shown.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Biographies,” in *Design in America*, 276.

<sup>20</sup> “Lydia W. Malbin, 91, a Collector of European Art” obituary, *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1989; Mary Roche, “Room Designers Exhibit Settings,” *New York Times*, 2 Oct. 1947.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Baldwin, *Benjamin Baldwin: An Autobiography in Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 25; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” *Interiors* 107, no. 3 (Oct. 1947): 111; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge Ideally in Saarinen-Swanson Modern,” *House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 154.

<sup>22</sup> “Biographies,” in *Design in America*, 268. Dusenbury studied at Cranbrook intermittently beginning in 1935.

<sup>23</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 155; See also below.

<sup>24</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group.”

<sup>25</sup> “General Session Evening May 5,” script, 5 May 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; “Local Tieup for Saarinen,” *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 May 1947; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 109.

<sup>26</sup> “Market Retrospect,” 10.

### Saarinenswanson Group furniture

When Pipsan and Bob had begun gestating the line, furniture was the starting point.<sup>27</sup> The Saarinen-Swanson Group comprised thirty-two pieces that had been part of Flexible Home Arrangements, along with approximately thirty new products manufactured by Johnson and the Mueller Furniture Co., another Grand Rapids manufacturer (figs. 1-10).<sup>28</sup> The new pieces maintained continuity with the earlier pieces by using the same woods (birch veneer and solid maple) and similarly boxy case units. On the new products, the Swansons changed the hardware to either satin grey metal wavy pulls or satin grey metal oversized disc pulls (figs. 6, 9, 10). They added additional satin metal accents on some case pieces in the form of metal tubing (figs. 9). Pipsan and Bob introduced occasional glass details in the forms of tabletops and cabinet doors (figs. 7-8). They also altered the base of the case furniture, replacing the enclosed platform bases of the Flexible Home Arrangements pieces with two wavy bentwood supports that raised the main compartment off the floor (fig. 10). The new base eliminated the need for the cantilevered top back extension, a key feature of the earlier pieces that allowed the tops to butt flush against the wall and mimic the appearance of built-in furniture. The back extension was no longer necessary since the wavy supports were positioned in from the back edge and elevated the body enough to provide space for base boards. The Swansons expanded the range of seating furniture with five new upholstered chairs: a side chair with an all-in-one seat and back, a split-back side chair, a plywood armchair, and two styles of sectional sofas (figs. 1-2, 4).<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Flexible Home Arrangements, there is no evidence that Eliel was involved in designing the new furniture or any other Saarinen-Swanson Group furnishings. By this time, Eliel, in

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<sup>27</sup> Florence Davies, "For Use and Beauty: Artist Group Creates Home Backgrounds," *Detroit News*, 23 Feb. 1947.

<sup>28</sup> "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group."

<sup>29</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 222-28.

his seventies, had slowed down his architectural practice and retired from Cranbrook.<sup>30</sup> Pipsan and Bob had been working as designers for about two decades by this point, yet much of their work had been on Eliel's projects or influenced by his style and approach. Eliel's commitment to designing interiors that integrated with architecture had been simulated with Flexible Home Arrangements through modular designs that, when placed together in a room, took on the look of one seamless, built-in unit. The furniture that Pipsan and Bob designed for the Saarinen-Swanson Group after the war, on the other hand, were less successful as modular units. Fewer sizes were offered in 1947 than in 1940, making it less likely a customer could assemble pieces to closely fit a space.<sup>31</sup> And when the 1947 pieces were set next to each other, the wavy supports appeared irregularly spaced, betraying the fact that it was an assemblage of separate units (fig. 3). Compared to Flexible Home Arrangements, the 1947 pieces introduced more bold curving forms, S-shapes, and prominent metallic accents. The curving details invoked the Aaltos' work, while the metallic accents recalled American design from recent years. Paul Frankl, for example, had designed furniture with similar wavy metallic drawer pulls in 1942, and oversized circular metal pulls appeared on furniture in shelter magazines since the early 1940s.<sup>32</sup> Saarinen-Swanson Group marketing and press material explained that the new pieces were "styled with a little more elegance" than the "basic" pieces designed in 1940.<sup>33</sup> With the new furniture, the Swansons branched out from Eliel's influence to experiment with recent design trends in an effort to find their own voice.

Pipsan's interest in curving wood forms can be traced to her interiors from the late 1930s and early 1940s. At that time, she used bentwood furniture designed by Alvar Aalto, Gilbert Rohde,

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<sup>30</sup> Clark, "Cranbrook and the Search for Twentieth-Century Form," 32.

<sup>31</sup> Sloane booklet; Johnson Furniture Co., *Flexible Home Arrangements by Johnson* (Grand Rapids, MI: Johnson Furniture Co., undated [ca. 1947]).

<sup>32</sup> "Today's Modern Furniture," *Interiors* 101, no. 10 (May 1942): 46; For oversized metal pulls, see for example, "Designing Today's Furniture: Gilbert Rohde," *Interiors* 100, no. 11 (June 1941): 20.

<sup>33</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty"; "Furniture for Moderns Enlists Aid of Fine Art," *Detroit Free Press*, 24 Aug. 1947; "General Session"; Sheppard, "For Modern Living."

and Russel Wright on several occasions.<sup>34</sup> Two of such bentwood chairs were similar to chairs Bob and Pipsan designed for the Saarinen-Swanson Group. A Rohde-designed side chair and a Saarinen-Swanson Group side chair both had curving, upholstered, all-in-one seats and backs with a backward flare at the top (figs. 11-12). A Wright-designed armchair and a Saarinen-Swanson Group armchair both had bentwood back legs that continued under the seat and L-shaped arm rests that extended into front legs (figs. 13-14).

Pipsan had also decorated earlier interiors with products that had similar satin grey metal accents as those on Saarinen-Swanson Group furniture. Previously, she used International Style lamps with satin grey tubular metal components designed by Kurt Versen and Nessen Studio, Inc. (figs. 11, 15-16). She had also previously ordered Flexible Home Arrangements pieces with custom metal hardware—large satin grey metal disc and wavy satin grey metal pulls, both comparable to the hardware on the Saarinen-Swanson Group case furniture (figs. 17-18).

The way the Swansons developed their furniture line was constrained by post-war conditions. Case goods were more heavily impacted, and for longer after the war, than other wood furniture types. The carcasses of case furniture were made from lumber, which the government allocated to the construction of small homes for veterans through August 1947—after the Saarinen-Swanson Group was released.<sup>35</sup> The Swansons, therefore, saw through the design, development, and manufacture of the new case pieces under tight material controls. By carrying over Flexible Home Arrangements pieces into the Saarinen-Swanson Group, the Swansons had a robust base upon which to expand the line. To create the new range, they made small adjustments to the 1940 models that required minimal fabrication changes, while still aligning with design trends and Pipsan's interior design style.

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<sup>34</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>35</sup> "For Your Information," *Interiors* 105, no. 1 (Aug. 1945): 104; "Supply Situation," *Interiors* 105, no. 7 (Feb. 1946): 118; "For Your Information," *Interiors* 107, no. 1 (Aug. 1947): 10.

### From a line of furniture to a “complete coordinated group”

Besides furniture, Pipsan’s most pressing need for her interior design work was textiles. Textiles and furniture were by far the most common categories of furnishings she sourced for clients. Prior to designing the Saarinen-Swanson Group, she typically used a mix of ready-made and custom textiles, in a way similar to her mixing ready-made and custom furniture before designing Flexible Home Arrangements. Pipsan often went to great lengths to procure the specific fabric she envisioned. As discussed in chapter 2, in the second half of the 1930s and 1940, Pipsan attempted to have custom and customized textiles fabricated by manufacturers.

Pipsan also sometimes commissioned custom handwoven curtains, floor coverings, and table linens from Studio Loja Saarinen. In 1940, the Koebels (the first of Pipsan’s clients to have Flexible Home Arrangements in their home), spent over \$1500 on textiles woven at Loja’s studio, an extravagant expenditure considering that the median family income in 1939 was \$1,231.<sup>36</sup> A simple six-by-nine-foot library rug cost the Koebels \$152.50.<sup>37</sup> Accounting for inflation, the rug would have cost about \$243 in 1947. On the other hand, a simple (but slightly larger) nine-by-nine-foot rug in the Saarinen-Swanson Group retailed for \$110—45% of the cost of the Studio Loja Saarinen rug.<sup>38</sup> The machine-woven Saarinen-Swanson Group napkins designed by Strengell cost no more than 26% of earlier comparable ones woven at Studio Loja Saarinen.<sup>39</sup> By the time the Saarinen-Swanson

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<sup>36</sup> “Decorating Net Costs: Charles J. Koebel Residence,” undated [1940], box 2, folder 9, SP; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1943* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 390.

<sup>37</sup> “Koebel Decorating,” undated [1940], box 2, folder 11, SP; “Textiles sold to Pipsan S. Swanson by Loja Saarinen,” undated [1940], box 2, folder 11, SP.

<sup>38</sup> Saarinen-Swanson Group Price List, box 15, folder 4, SAR.

<sup>39</sup> Saarinen-Swanson Group Price List; “Textiles sold to Pipsan S. Swanson by Loja Saarinen,” undated [1940], box 2, folder 11, SP. For the cost of Studio Loja Saarinen textiles, I factored in Pipsan’s 25% decorator’s fee, and I accounted for inflation.



Group was released, Loja's studio had been closed for five years, so even if Pipsan's clients could have afforded such expensive furnishings, Pipsan had lost her supplier.

The Saarinen-Swanson Group textiles aligned with Pipsan's established interior design style. The textural solid and striped fabrics Strengell designed were similar to those Pipsan used in interiors from the late 1930s and 1940 (figs. 1, 19-22). Pipsan often used stripes in her interiors, and for the Saarinen-Swanson Group she designed three *printed* stripes. One replicated the look of a woven stripe she had designed, and probably had made at Studio Loja Saarinen, in the 1930s (figs. 23-24). Among the other prints Pipsan designed were patterns with curlicues, squiggly lines, and stars and amoeboid shapes (fig. 25). In a 1940 interior, Pipsan had used a squiggly/amoeboid print designed by Dan Cooper, a prominent designer of interiors and furnishings (figs. 19, 26-27).<sup>40</sup> The Saarinen-Swanson Group prints were in Pipsan's desired colours, printed on light-beige, textural grounds. She had started seeking out such "natural" colours and textures for her interiors projects years earlier, as discussed in chapter 2.

The other Saarinen-Swanson Group furnishings can also be related Pipsan's earlier interiors. As discussed, Pipsan often used International Style lamps, most frequently ones designed by Walter von Nessen.<sup>41</sup> Pipsan appears to have preferred one particular Nessen lamp, using it in at least three different residences (fig. 15). Nessen Studio, however, had closed in 1943.<sup>42</sup> Although it would reopen after the war, Pipsan could not have known this at the time. The loss of such an important supplier may have encouraged Pipsan to move into lamp design herself. Along with the International Style lamps, Pipsan also previously used rattan lamps (figs. 28-29). Her lamp designs

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<sup>40</sup> John Stuart Gordon, ed., *A Modern World: American Design from the Yale University Art Gallery, 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2011), 356, 406.

<sup>41</sup> Nessen Studio lamps were used in the Calingaert (1936-1937), Patten (1939), Koebel (1940), Eden (1940), and Neff (1940-1942) residences. A Kurt Verson lamp was also used in the Koebel residence. Calingaert accounting books, undated [1936-1937], box 1, folder 16, SP; Nessen Studio invoice, box 11, folder 16, SAR; "Decorating Net Costs: Charles J. Koebel Residence," box 2, folder 9, SP; Nessen Studio invoice, box 2, folder 12, SP; "A House and Interiors Designed for Each Other," *House & Garden*, Oct. 1946, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Howard and Setliff, "In 'A Man's World,'" 280.

for the Saarinen-Swanson Group synthesized the rattan and International Style ones. Pipsan's versions had satin grey tubular metal stems, some wrapped at the top and bottom with hemp twine in a manner similar to the cane banding on rattan lamps she had previously used (figs. 28, 30-33).<sup>43</sup> She topped her lamp designs with metal shades or ones made of textural beige fabric or "parchment" plastic—natural-looking materials that echoed the aesthetic of the rattan lamps.<sup>44</sup>

The two lamps designed by Baldwin in the Saarinen-Swanson Group aligned with the International Style (figs. 34-35). One was a design he and fellow Cranbrook alumnus Harry Weese submitted to the 1940 MoMA *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* competition (fig. 35). The lamp was featured in the eponymous 1941 exhibition and was intended to go into production thereafter, but plans were thwarted by wartime metal restrictions.<sup>45</sup> By including the lamp in the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Baldwin and Weese's design had a second chance to make it to market.<sup>46</sup>

Photographs of Pipsan's earlier interiors picture transparent glassware with spherical and undulating forms, comparable in material and form to glassware she designed for the Saarinen-Swanson Group (figs. 37-45). Pipsan also designed a satin grey metal vase for the Saarinen-Swanson Group with an undulating form, comparable to satin grey metal vases she had used in previous interiors (figs. 46-48).

The metal candelabrum in the Saarinen-Swanson Group had been designed by Bob in 1935 and was used in one of Pipsan's interior design jobs the following year, as discussed in chapter 2. The three other metalware designed by Bob in the Saarinen-Swanson Group—a flower holder,

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<sup>43</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 225.

<sup>44</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 225; Page of Mutual Sunset Lamp catalogue, "Furniture, Fabrics, Glassware, Lamps and Accessories designed by J. Robert F. Swanson Pipsan S. Swanson, 1928-1965" scrapbook, box 20, folder 1, SP.

<sup>45</sup> Eliot Noyes, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 37; Baldwin, *Autobiography*, 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> It is not known why Harry Weese was not credited in the Saarinen-Swanson Group. It is possible that Baldwin's and Weese's lamps never went into production with the Saarinen-Swanson Group and were only shown in model rooms.

andirons, and fireplace tools—were probably also designed in the 1930s and possibly used in Pipsan’s interiors (Figs. 49-51).<sup>47</sup>

The Saarinen-Swanson Group ceramics can be loosely related to Pipsan’s earlier interiors from the 1930s to 1940. In them, she included simple figurative sculptures (figs. 52-54). On at least three occasions, she commissioned custom-made ceramics: once she enlisted Eero to design sculptural tiles and at least twice she enlisted Cranbrook-trained Lilian Swann (Eero’s wife at the time) to make figurative sculptures (fig. 54).<sup>48</sup> For the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Charles Dusenbury contributed a figurative sculpture that was in a similar rough, Expressionistic style as Swann’s (fig. 55). Lydia Winston’s decorative vessels for the Saarinen-Swanson Group possessed a similar Expressionistic texture as Swann’s and Dusenbury’s work, but beyond this they do not correlate with Pipsan’s earlier interiors (figs. 56-57). Winston’s ceramic dinnerware cannot be related to Pipsan’s earlier interiors because she rarely provided dinnerware to her interior design clients, and it is not known what such products looked like (fig. 58).<sup>49</sup> However, a line of dishes was a logical addition to the Saarinen-Swanson Group, which was intended to be a “complete coordinated group” of home furnishings.<sup>50</sup>

Complete sales numbers do not exist, but it is known that by July 11, 1947, just five weeks after the line debuted, the Swansons’ had \$18,510.24 in net income from orders.<sup>51</sup> This was an

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<sup>47</sup> Bob to Walter von Nessen, 12 Feb. 1936, box 1, folder 7, SP; Bob to Walter von Nessen, 13 April 1936, box 1, folder 9, SP; Margareta von Nessen to Bob, 14 April 1936, box 1, folder 9, SP. Bob had designed a flower holder, andirons, and fireplace tools around the same time he designed the candelabrum, although it is only known what the candelabrum looked like. The Saarinen-Swanson Group flower holder, andirons, and fireplace tools date stylistically to the mid-1930s and are in a similar style as the candelabrum.

<sup>48</sup> Decorating cost list, 12 June 1929, Mendelssohn residence, box 1, folder 5, SP; “Koebel,” 15 Aug. 1940, box 2, folder 9, SP; Lilian Swann’s sketches for “Pipsan’s fireplace job,” box 5, folders 70-71, Lilian Swann Saarinen papers, circa 1909-1977, AAASI; Lilian Swann Saarinen, interview by Robert F. Brown, Director, Boston office of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1979-1981, AAASI. On one occasion that Pipsan enlisted Swann to make sculpture for an interior, Pipsan told Swann she could make any figures she wanted as long as they were “wild.”

<sup>49</sup> “List of furnishings for McDonald [*sic*] Apts,” undated [1941], box 4, folder 19, SAR.

<sup>50</sup> Saarinen-Swanson Group Price List.

<sup>51</sup> “Saarinen Swanson and Saarinen Accounts Receivable: July 11, 1947,” box 6, folder 9, SP.

impressive early response considering the median family income for 1947 was \$3,033.<sup>52</sup> In October, the line was available for purchase in seventeen department stores across the country, including James McCreery & Co. in New York City, Marshall Field & Company in Chicago, and Barker Brothers in Los Angeles.<sup>53</sup> *House & Garden*, *Interiors*, and *Architectural Record* published articles on the Saarinen-Swanson Group, and the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press*, and other smaller newspapers also covered the line.<sup>54</sup> Such desirable press and wide distribution were impressive feats, considering Pipsan and Bobs' relatively small stature in the design world at the time and the post-war manufacturing obstacles in the way of the line's development. Years later, Bob recalled that the line was "very successful."<sup>55</sup>

The Saarinen-Swanson Group arrived on the market at an auspicious time, when the popularity of modern design was greater than ever among American consumers. After architect-designer George Nelson became design director of Herman Miller in 1946, he undertook an extensive study of the American furniture industry.<sup>56</sup> In 1947, he reported that "surveys of styling developments in furniture over the past five years show a phenomenal increase in the sales of 'modern.' According to one of the leading consultants in the field, Alfred Auerbach, the percentage is between 33 and 40 per cent [*sic*] of total sales."<sup>57</sup> A 1949 survey of furniture and department store sales in forty-six cities returned similar figures. According to the survey, which was included in a government report on the state of the furniture industry, 42% of sales in upholstered furniture from the previous season were in modern styles; 34% of occasional pieces were modern; 42% of all

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<sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1950* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1951), 269.

<sup>53</sup> Eugenia Sheppard, "For Modern Living," *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 Sept. 1947; Roche, "Room Designers"; "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 228; "Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson," 154.

<sup>54</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge"; "Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson," 108-13, 150-54; "Coordinated Interior Design: The Saarinen-Swanson Group," *Architectural Record* 102, no. 5 (Nov. 1947): 78-79; Roche, "Room Designers"; Sheppard, "For Modern Living."

<sup>55</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley Abercrombie, *George Nelson: The Design of Modern Design* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 85-86.

<sup>57</sup> Nelson, "The Furniture Industry," 178.

bedroom furniture were modern, and 27% of all dining room furniture were modern. In three of these categories, modern was second in popularity to eighteenth-century-style furniture, whereas in the bedroom furniture category, modern was the most popular style sold.<sup>58</sup>

### Family conflict and new partnerships

Who was and was not involved in the Saarinen-Swanson Group may have been impacted by conflict in the Saarinen architecture office while the line was developing. In the previous decade, when working in collaboration with Eliel as well as Eero, Bob felt that he was sometimes denied credit he deserved or his design and managerial contributions were diminished in publicity. Bob also resented his strained financial position that prohibited him from working on as many competition designs as Eliel and Eero; such projects brought them recognition and respect in the design world, but did not guarantee a financial return.<sup>59</sup> After the war, when Eliel began to slow down, Eero assumed the head role in the architecture office. Tension developed between Eero and Bob because they had different priorities.<sup>60</sup> Bob was business minded and prioritized financial concerns, whereas Eero's standards for his work were so high that he did not spare time or money to achieve the best possible result.<sup>61</sup> Even though the disharmony between Bob and Eero did not directly involve Pipsan, it was her duty as a supportive wife to side with Bob. Sometime in late 1947, after the release of the Saarinen-

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<sup>58</sup> James B. Forman, "The Furniture Industry and Its Potential Market," (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1950), 10-11.

<sup>59</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Bob to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel's biographer, 25 April 1972, CJP.

<sup>60</sup> Bob to Christ-Janer; Bob Jr., interview by the author, 26 Sept. 2019; Eero to his psychiatrist Dr. B., April 1952, box 2, folder 49, Aline and Eero Saarinen Papers, AAASI.

<sup>61</sup> Glen Paulsen, architect who worked in Eero's office from 1949-1951 and 1953-1957, interview by John Gerard, Curator, Cranbrook Art Museum, 18 May 1982, box 5, tape 273, COHI; Glen Paulsen, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 7 Aug. 1992, box 2, tapes 67-68, COHI; Charles Eames, interview by Anssi Blomstedt, 1976, box 4, tape 232, COHI; Olav Hammerstrom, architect who worked in Eero's office from 1949 to 1954, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 17 Dec. 1990, box 2, tape 78, COHI.

Swanson Group, Bob and Pipsan legally split from the Saarinen architecture office and established their own business, Swanson Associates.<sup>62</sup>

The strain between Bob and Eero while the line was developing may have made it impossible for people close to Eero to participate in the Saarinen-Swanson Group. Eero's wife Lilian Swann, for example, was set to contribute sculptures to the line as of February 1947.<sup>63</sup> But by June, when the line was shown to buyers, she was no longer involved.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps Swann could not play the role of dutiful wife if she stayed involved in Bob's project.

When the Saarinen-Swanson Group became too large for Pipsan and Bob to handle alone, they enlisted friends and colleagues to collaborate. Strengell was so close to the Swansons that she described them as "practically in the family."<sup>65</sup> By this time, Strengell had achieved renown for her position as head of the Cranbrook Academy of Art weaving department. She had recently established relationships with some textile manufactures, at least one of which she secured to manufacture textiles for the Saarinen-Swanson Group.<sup>66</sup>

While the Saarinen-Swanson Group was taking shape, Strengell was married to Dusenbury; it was at her urging that he agreed to contribute sculpture to the line.<sup>67</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, the two divorced, and because of their separation, Dusenbury's involvement in the group was limited to the "publicity stunt," as Bob put it.<sup>68</sup> The publicity stunt was probably the debut presentation at the

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<sup>62</sup> "History of the Organization," box 7, folder 8, SFP.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty."

<sup>64</sup> "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group."

<sup>65</sup> Marianne Strengell, interview by Robert F. Brown, Director, Boston office of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 8 Jan., 18 March, and 16 Dec. 1982, AAASI; Bob Jr., Ronald Swanson, and Jan Swanson, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 9 March 2005, box 5, tape 328, COHI.

<sup>66</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard; Strengell, interview by Brown; Megan Elisabeth Fiely, "Within a Framework of Limitations? Marianne Strengell's Work As An Educator, Weaver, And Designer" (master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2006), 76-77.

<sup>67</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

<sup>68</sup> Bob, interview by Gerard.

Johnson showroom in June 1947, for which Dusenbury was present “to answer all questions regarding his sculpture.”<sup>69</sup>

Lydia Winston was good friends with both Pipsan and Strengell.<sup>70</sup> Although she was not well known as a craftsperson or designer, Winston had experience in ceramics through her Cranbrook training. Perhaps by involving Winston, who was the least established designer of the group, the Swansons were in part returning a favour. Winston’s father had been instrumental early in Pipsan’s career by recommending her to the president of Packard, helping her secure one of her earliest independent design jobs.<sup>71</sup> Winston’s relation to Kahn, one of Detroit’s most famous architects, was noted in the Saarinen-Swanson Group marketing and press material.<sup>72</sup>

It is not known if the Swansons were close to Baldwin, but Strengell was, and she may have brought him into the mix. Baldwin was Strengell’s student at Cranbrook in the late 1930s, and they became friends and later worked on other projects together besides the Saarinen-Swanson Group.<sup>73</sup> In marketing material, press articles, and other documentation on the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Baldwin was not always listed as a contributing designer.<sup>74</sup> But when he was listed, it was pointed out that he won an award in the 1940 MoMA *Organic Design* competition.<sup>75</sup> Baldwin may have also helped secure the lamp manufacturer for the Swanson’s project. The company that fabricated his and Weese’s 1940 lamp design, Mutual Sunset Lamp Co., subsequently produced the Saarinen-Swanson Group lamps.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group.”

<sup>70</sup> Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022; Marianne Strengell, interview by Mark Coir, Director, Cranbrook Archives, 17 Dec. 1990, box 2, tape 78, COHI.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>72</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “Michigan Designs Modern in the Saarinen-Swanson Group,” Hudson’s Training Department booklet, Oct. 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 150.

<sup>73</sup> Baldwin, *Autobiography*, 28; Brown interview with Strengell; Marianne Holden Bemis, “Marianne Strengell” *Weaver and Craftsman* (Winter 1956-1957): 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Pipsan’s CV, ca. 1948; Saarinen-Swanson Group Price List; Sheppard, “For Modern Living”; Roche, “Room Designers.”

<sup>75</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 157; Hudson’s advertisement, *Detroit Free Press*, 28 Sept. 1947.

<sup>76</sup> Baldwin, *Autobiography*, 25.

With their new furnishings line, Pipsan and Bob retained a connection to the Saarinens by naming it the *Saارينen*-Swanson Group. Perhaps they named it this because Pipsan was a co-creator of the line, and the Saarinen name was part of her public identity.<sup>77</sup> Pipsan's maiden name was probably also incorporated in the line's name for marketing purposes. The name for Pipsan and Bob's first independent mass-production line was important since it was marketed and distributed across the country, serving to establish their identities as furnishing designers in their own rights. The name they chose reiterated Pipsan and Bob's claim to the Saarinen creative legacy. A renowned name added cachet to the new home furnishings line and would have helped the Swansons garner attention from a national audience who would have been less familiar with the (less illustrious and more common) Swanson name. Indeed, in press coverage on the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Pipsan's family name was a talking point: she was sometimes described as Eliel Saarinen's daughter.<sup>78</sup> The name Saarinen-Swanson Group also gave Pipsan visibility since she was the sole Saarinen member in the group.

### Pipsan's development

Through the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Pipsan branched out as an independent designer into mass-produced metalware, glassware, lamps, and printed textiles. She appears to have learned to design these product types in a variety of ways. Printed textiles was the area she was most prepared for. As discussed in chapter 1, in adolescence she designed and dyed batik textiles after Loja taught her the technique, she sketched repeat patterns for textiles or wallpaper, and she took higher-education courses in fabric design. The first known time one of her pattern designs was fabricated was in 1929, when she designed the textile wall covering for Eliel's model dining room in the 1929 MMA

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<sup>77</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>78</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge Ideally," 156; Edith Weigle, "Grand Rapids New Furniture Lures Buyers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1947.



exhibition *The Architect and the Industrial Arts*.<sup>79</sup> It is not known when Pipsan became familiar with screen printing, the method used to print her Saarinen-Swanson Group textile designs. Although not a new process, screen printing increased in popularity in the 1940s as an inexpensive, low-technology alternative to roller printing, because metal rollers were repurposed for the war effort.<sup>80</sup> By 1943, Strengell had outfitted the Cranbrook weaving studios with screen printing facilities, and because Strengell was a close friend, Pipsan probably had access to the equipment to learn the process as well as the potential and limitations of the technique, if she was not familiar by then.<sup>81</sup>

Pipsan's work as an interior designer also helped prepare her to design mass-produced textiles. As discussed in chapter 2, as early as 1936, she asked manufacturers to fabricate custom designs or customized versions of catalogue items; in doing so, she gained knowledge about the capacity and costs involved in factory-made textiles. Through these interactions, and by sourcing textiles for her clients, she developed a network of manufacturers, providing her with insight into possible candidates to produce her own work as well as contacts within companies to begin discussions about a collaboration. Pipsan had, in fact, previously purchased catalogue products from the company that produced her Saarinen-Swanson Group textiles, Goodall Decorative Fabrics.<sup>82</sup>

Pipsan's experience with metals dated to her adolescence, when she made hand-wrought small non-ferrous metalware.<sup>83</sup> The material knowledge she gained through that work may have been somewhat useful when designing furnishings for the Saarinen-Swanson Group. It would have given her, at the very least, a sensitivity to metallic forms, colours, and finishes. There would have been a learning curve, however, because the Saarinen-Swanson Group products were made of ferrous

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<sup>79</sup> The textile wall covering was produced by Orinoka Mills, a high-end manufacturer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *Architect and Industrial Arts*, 61.

<sup>80</sup> Susan Ward, "The Design, Promotion, and Production of Modern Textiles in the USA, 1940-1960," in *Knoll Textiles: 1945-2010*, ed. Earl Martin (New Haven: Yale University Press published for Bard Graduate Center, 2011), 46.

<sup>81</sup> Fiely, "Within a Framework of Limitations," 77-78.

<sup>82</sup> Pipsan to Goodall Decorative Fabrics, 26 April 1943, box 11, folder 7, SAR; Goodall order, 1942-1944, box 12, folder 15, SAR; Pipsan's handwritten note, Jeffries residence, undated [1936-1943], box 1, folder 20, SP.

<sup>83</sup> See chapter 1.

metals, which took platings that were not used on the copper and silver metals she was familiar with. Her Saarinen-Swanson Group products also comprised components made by machine (e.g., tubing), unlike the hand-raised methods she had experience with. Moreover, she had not previously designed lamps.

Glass was a medium Pipsan is not known to have engaged with in any capacity prior to the Saarinen-Swanson Group. She did not study it formally in Finland, and unlike metals and textiles, there was never a glass workshop at Cranbrook, so she could not have gained exposure to glassmaking there. It is possible she learned something about glassware design and fabrication by way of her father's experience. For his interiors in Finland, Eliel designed glass lamps, of which little is known, and for his 1929 model dining room shown at the MMA, he designed glass stemware, fabricated by Corning Glassworks in New York.<sup>84</sup> Years later, when Pipsan became active in glassware design, she had her father to consult if need be.

At least part of Pipsan's training in glassware design came from working with the company that produced her Saarinen-Swanson Group products, the United States Glass Company in Tiffin, Ohio, colloquially known as Tiffin Glass. A Tiffin Glass employee—someone with evident expertise in glass production methods—made notations on some of Pipsan's technical drawings, pointing out details that were either impossible to execute or would result in unsound products. For example, on Pipsan's sketch for a goblet, the Tiffin employee noted that the stem was too narrow at the base to support the weight of the top of the glass; as designed the stem would likely crack.<sup>85</sup> On this drawing and another one, the Tiffin employee asked Pipsan to add “buttons,” little gobs of glass that

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<sup>84</sup> See Amberg, *Saarinen's Interior Design, 2; The Architect and the Industrial Arts*, 61.

<sup>85</sup> No. 77 goblet drawing, 27 May 1948, box 12, folder 1, Tiffin Glass Company Collection, MS-401, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, photocopies in the Cranbrook Archives (hereafter cited as Tiffin Collection); Thank you to Kim Harty, Associate Professor of Glass at the College for Creative Studies (Detroit, MI), for your explanation of the notes on the glassware drawings. Email to author, 25 March, 2022.

attached the stem to the foot and provided strength to the join.<sup>86</sup> The Tiffin employee also noted that a corner in one drawing was too sharp to be pressed in a mould.<sup>87</sup>

To manufacture these and Pipsan's other designs, Tiffin Glass used two methods: pressing and mould blowing. Both methods used moulds, but different kinds of moulds, and each method had particular possibilities and limitations. At some point Pipsan had to learn the difference between the two methods as well as what each method was suited for, and how to design accordingly. She appears to have gotten more knowledgeable about fabrication methods over time. Pipsan's earliest glassware drawings do not note a fabrication method. But five months after she began designing glassware, and increasingly over the next year, she sometimes specified whether a design was to be pressed or blown.<sup>88</sup>

Despite having to educate Pipsan on glass production, Tiffin Glass's experience working with her must have been worth the effort. After they produced her designs for the Saarinen-Swanson Group, they continued to produce and distribute some of those designs, and they engaged her to design for them for the next two years.<sup>89</sup> Many of her designs ceased production by 1950, but at least one design was produced well beyond her term of employment. An ameboid flower floater she designed for the Saarinen-Swanson Group was still sold by the company in 1968, over twenty years after it was designed (fig. 42).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> No. 77 goblet drawing, 27 May 1948; Glassware drawing, Feb. 1947, box 12, folder 1, Tiffin Collection; Harty, email to author.

<sup>87</sup> No. 77 goblet drawing, 27 May 1948.

<sup>88</sup> Glassware drawings, 21 Jan. 1947-27 July 1948, Tiffin Collection.

<sup>89</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1971.

<sup>90</sup> 1968 Tiffin Glass catalogue reprinted in Kelly O'Kane and Fred Bickenheuser, *Tiffin Glassmasters: The Modern Years* (St. Paul, MN.: K. O'Kane, 1998), 232.

### Pipsan's visibility

The Saarinen-Swanson Group was additionally significant to Pipsan's career development because she received clear credit for her work. In the previous mass-produced line, Flexible Home Arrangements, Pipsan's role was unclear. All that is known is that she was involved in designing the furniture and she considered herself to be one of the line's main designers, yet she was not portrayed as such in most of the publicity.<sup>91</sup> With the Saarinen-Swanson Group, on the other hand, Bob and Pipsan were unequivocally the project heads. The line was named after them, and marketing and press materials described how they initiated and coordinated the project while specifying the designer responsible for each product type.<sup>92</sup> Pipsan no longer played a vague background or supporting role. In fact, it was clear that she designed the largest number of products and worked across the widest range of media and product types.

The Saarinen-Swanson Group increased Pipsan's visibility in other ways. When the Swansons presented the line to buyers or the public, Bob usually acted as the main presenter. For example, at the Johnson showroom debut, Bob led buyers on a tour of the model rooms, and some months later, he presented a lecture and slideshow on the line at Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois.<sup>93</sup> Pipsan did not speak during the university talk, yet she was present, available to answer questions informally afterward.<sup>94</sup> At other times, as co-project head, Pipsan was forced to adopt a more public role. She and Bob were scheduled to present the Saarinen-Swanson Group at the 1947 Thanksgiving Day Parade put on by the J. L. Hudson Company, a Detroit department store. The Hudson's parade was a major event in the Midwest, with an estimated 150,000 in-person

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<sup>91</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>92</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty"; Sheppard, "For Modern Living"; "Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson," 108-13, 150-54; "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 156-57, 220-21; Hudson's training Department booklet, n.p.; Roche, "Room Designers"; "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group"; Saarinen-Swanson Group showroom photograph booklet, undated [1947], box 3, folder 8, SP.

<sup>93</sup> "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group."

<sup>94</sup> "Modern Furniture Creator to Speak," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), 11 Feb. 1948; "Emphasizes Flexibility in Furnishings," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), 16 Feb. 1948.

spectators that year, and the Swansons viewed the presentation as a fantastic opportunity to promote the Saarinen-Swanson Group.<sup>95</sup> However, at the last minute, Bob had to leave town to tend to another job, and Pipsan was left to represent the line on her own. She spoke on WWJ radio, a Detroit area station, and then she spoke again in person at Hudson's. After the event, she wrote to her son, who was away at college, expressing how significant it was for her speak on the radio and at the store:

Well the big splash is over! Daddy deserted me in the last moment, [*sic*] he was called to Washington by The Navy on the Point M[illeg.] job in California. He left Sunday night and I [*T' is underscored three times*] had to get up at 6:30 in the morning and amble down to WWJ to speak on the Hudson parade!!! You would never have thought that of your mother. It was harder to do then [*sic*] to get the whole S.S.G. [Saarinen-Swanson Group] together. Anyway it all went well (so they say). Then everybody gathered at Hudson's at 10:30 (when I had to say a few words again.)<sup>96</sup>

Pipsan conveyed how contrary public speaking was to her nature. Family members similarly remembered Pipsan as quiet and reserved, while Bob was much more domineering and outgoing.<sup>97</sup> In the case of the Hudson's parade, Pipsan had to step out of her comfort zone in the name of their mass-production project.

Some of Pipsan's glassware, printed textile, and lamp designs received press coverage and critical recognition on their own, as individual products rather than as a component of the Saarinen-Swanson Group. *Better Homes & Gardens* featured her glassware twice; the *New York Times* also featured her glassware as well as a printed textile and a lamp; and *Interiors* published one of her printed textiles.<sup>98</sup> When the AID selected the best designs of 1947, it awarded Pipsan's twin bed lamp and one of her Goodall prints Honorable Mention (fig. 32).<sup>99</sup> One of her glass vases was

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<sup>95</sup> "Shivering Throngs See Santa Parade," *Detroit Free Press*, 28 Nov. 1947; Pipsan to Bob Jr., fall 1947 [late November], box 8, folder 14, SP.

<sup>96</sup> Pipsan to Bob Jr.

<sup>97</sup> Karen Swanson, interview by the author, 25 July 2017; Bob Jr., Ronald Swanson, and Jan Swanson, interview by Coir.

<sup>98</sup> "Gifts She'll Use Every Day," *Better Homes & Gardens*, Dec. 1948; "Crystal for Christmas and a Sparkling Table," *Better Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1949; "New Accessories for Serving Ready," *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 1948; Mary Roche, "Honors for Design," *New York Times*, 15 Feb. 1948; "Light on Finnish Food," *Interiors* 108, no. 3 (Oct. 1948): 130-31.

<sup>99</sup> AID award certificates, 1947, box 9, folder 6, SP.

included in the MoMA exhibition *Design Show: Christmas 1949* and the seminal 1949 DIA exhibition curated by Alexander Girard, *An Exhibition for Modern Living* (fig. 59). The same glass vase was also published in Edgar Kaufmann Jr.'s book *What is Modern Design?*<sup>100</sup>

Some of the relationships Pipsan established with manufacturers through the Saarinen-Swanson Group exceeded the life of the furnishings line. In addition to Pipsan's extended relationship with Tiffin Glass, already discussed, she continued to design for Cray of Boston, the company that manufactured Pipsan's wavy metal vase for the Saarinen-Swanson Group. Pipsan went on to design several other vases and candleholders for the company, one of which won an AID Honorable Mention award in 1948 and was featured in *House Beautiful*, *House & Garden*, and *Better Homes & Gardens* (fig. 60).<sup>101</sup> Pipsan's relationship with Goodall, the manufacturer of her printed textiles, does not appear to have outlived the Saarinen-Swanson Group. However, her designs manufactured by them probably helped her gain employment five years later with Edwin Raphael Company Inc., a Michigan manufacturer that engaged Pipsan to design printed drapery textiles for seventeen years, from 1952 until at least 1971.<sup>102</sup>

Through her activity in mass-produced lamp, metalware, and glassware design, Pipsan was pressing beyond the gender barriers in the design world. Although there were other women designers recognized for their work in these areas, including Belle Kogan, Freda Diamond, Virginia Hamill, Dorothy Thorpe, Greta von Nessen, and Greta Magnusson Grossman, most known designers in these areas were men.<sup>103</sup> In the ten years from 1940 to 1950, the percentage of designers

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<sup>100</sup> Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> Cray of Boston 1950 Catalog, "Furniture, Fabrics, Glassware, Lamps and Accessories designed by J. Robert F. Swanson Pipsan S. Swanson, 1928-1965" scrapbook, box 20, folder 1, SP; Pipsan CV, ca. 1971; AID award certificate, 1948, box 9, folder 6, SP.

<sup>102</sup> Pipsan CV, ca. 1971.

<sup>103</sup> Howard and Setliff, "In 'A Man's World,'" 269-81; Charles L. Venable et al., eds., *China and Glass in America, 1880-1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art distributed by H. N. Abrams, 2000), 385.

who were women actually went down from 38% to 26%.<sup>104</sup> Yet this was the decade when Pipsan's career as an independent designer of mass-produced furnishings blossomed. Her career was so successful that by the late 1940s, she could not handle the work on her own and she took on assistants, a mark of a mature, established designer.<sup>105</sup>

### Conclusion

Prior to the creation of the Saarinen-Swanson Group, in Pipsan's interiors from the late 1930s and early 1940s, she preferred certain types of products and materials, and she combined natural- and industrial-looking elements. Her interior design lexicon included a large amount of natural-finish wood furniture and textural fabrics, accented with touches of rounded transparent glass, Expressionistic ceramic decorations, industrial-looking satin grey metals, and rattan and other natural-looking materials. The Saarinen-Swanson Group used a similar design vocabulary as Pipsan's earlier interiors, providing her with an array of furnishings to better realize her idea of a modern interior than when she was restricted to manufacturers' catalogue items or custom-made furnishings.

Like Flexible Home Arrangements before it, the Saarinen-Swanson Group helped the Swansons on more than one level because the line was also sold as individual products nationwide. The favourable press that the Swansons received for the line, which featured them as project heads and versatile furnishing designers, helped them establish reputations outside Michigan; the esteem generated by national press, in turn, probably also helped them secure local interiors and

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<sup>104</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1943* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 124; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1955* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1956), 200.

<sup>105</sup> Saarinen, Saarinen and Swanson office reunion notes, 11-13 Aug. 1995, 1/7, 301 Washington Street Collection (C0001), Columbus Indiana Architectural Archives, Bartholomew County Public Library, Columbus, IN; Ruth Anne Silbar, "B'ham Designer's Work Becoming Recognized," *Birmingham Eccentric* (MI), 2 April 1953.

architectural work. The mass-produced line, therefore, aided Pipsan's interior design career in more ways than one.

In order to get an extensive line of home furnishings produced and onto the market expeditiously in the immediate post-war years, rife with obstacles for designers, the Swansons included many designs that had been fabricated by manufacturers, either as one-offs or serially, before the war. Over half of the furniture in the Saarinen-Swanson Group had been part of Flexible Home Arrangements. Most of the new furniture designs developed after the war were similar forms and materials as pre-war models, with minor or superficial changes. At least one (and probably all) of Bob's metalware designs and one of Baldwin's lamp designs had been designed and fabricated as one-offs by manufacturers before the war. Such preparatory measures lessened the time it would take to get the furnishings to market. To the metalware, furniture, and Baldwin's lamp, the Swansons added more lamps and metalware, woven and printed textiles, glassware, ceramic dinnerware, and decorative ceramics. This approach of combining old and new designs in a furnishings line allowed the Swansons to reinvigorate their mass-production work without investing the time and money it would take to develop an entirely new line. Adding all the new types of products to the core furniture group dramatically expanded the scope of the line and fundamentally changed the concept of the line.

Teamwork was something Eliel had long espoused among his students and in his architectural practice.<sup>106</sup> He instilled a collaborative work ethic in Pipsan by involving her and her brother in his projects since the late 1920s; Loja had contributed even earlier. By the late 1940s, Pipsan was maturing as an independent designer and as part of a design team with her husband. The Swansons had developed certain priorities in their design work that became irreconcilable with those of Pipsan's family members, primarily Eero's. The Swansons may also have felt that they would

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<sup>106</sup> Lilian Swann to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel's biographer, CJP; Saarinen, Saarinen and Swanson office reunion notes.



never be publicly recognized as designers in their own rights so long as they worked with Pipsan's renowned father. When they designed the Saarinen-Swanson Group independently of the other Saarinens, however, personal-work relationships remained key. Friendship, marriage, and fallings-out all impacted how the project took shape. Having friends who worked in a variety of media, in styles that aligned with Pipsan's established interior design style, was beneficial to the Swansons on several levels. The various Saarinen-Swanson Group members contributed not only expertise and furnishing designs, but industry connections and design-world clout. Connections and clout both helped get a product line made and marketed; in the Swanson's previous mass-production work, Eliel had contributed to these departments. Without Strengell's, Winston's, Baldwin's, and Dusenbury's contributions, the Saarinen-Swanson Group would not have been a compelling "complete coordinated group" of home furnishings.

The immediate post-war years was an especially difficult time for women designers to move their careers forward because, on top of the economic and industrial barriers facing all designers, they faced additional social barriers in accessing many design areas. Yet, at this time, through the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Pipsan entered four new areas of mass-production design. Likely because of the positive reception to her designs from critics and the press, and surely also because of sales numbers, some of these companies kept working with her thereafter.

Pipsan's entry into new areas of mass-production design was probably influenced by her family's financial situation and her husband's entrepreneurial impulses. Although the Swansons' financial pressures and Bob's business-mindedness were limiting in some ways, requiring them to focus on potentially lucrative work, the constraints directed and moulded Pipsan's career in ways that resulted in development, opportunity, and recognition for her. By developing a line of furnishings that could be mass produced, marketed, and distributed, Pipsan had the chance to design products in a variety of media, some for the first time.

The Saarinen-Swanson Group, like Flexible Home Arrangements before it, began in order to satisfy Pipsan's interior design needs, typically for Bob's architecture. Yet it developed into a project that paved new paths for Pipsan alone. With independent mass-production work, no longer did her role rely on or supplement the work of her husband. She and the other Saarinen-Swanson Group designers received clear credit for their design contributions. This was the first time Pipsan was publicly recognized as an independent mass-produced furnishings designer. It was also the first time Pipsan was widely recognized as a designer in fields with little female representation: furniture, glassware, metalware, and lamps. Not only had she entered these fields, but she subsequently received critical acclaim for her glassware, metalware, and lamp designs, as well as her printed textiles. Over the 1940s decade, the arc of Pipsan's career in mass-produced furnishings traced her development from being portrayed as Eliel's rarely credited subordinate to an independent furnishings designer with assistants of her own.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. Saarinen-Swanson Group model rooms, J. L. Hudson Company department store, Detroit, Michigan (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 154)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 2. Saarinen-Swanson Group furnishings (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 153)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 3. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan  
(J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 4. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan  
(J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 5. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan  
(J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 6. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan  
(J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 7. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 8. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

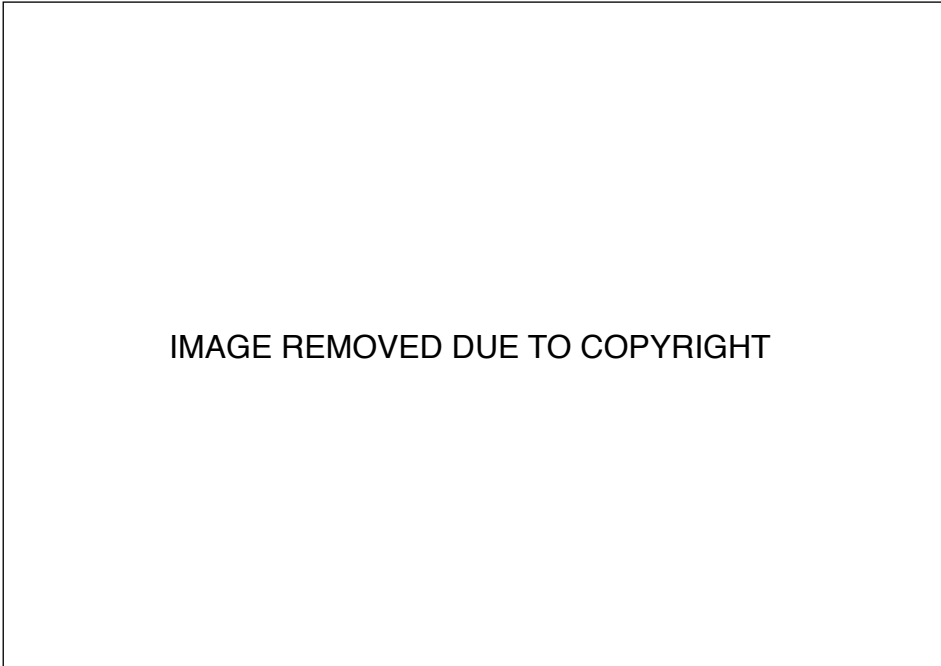


Figure 9. Saarinen-Swanson Group desk, designed by Pipsan and Bob, released 1947 (1stDibs website)

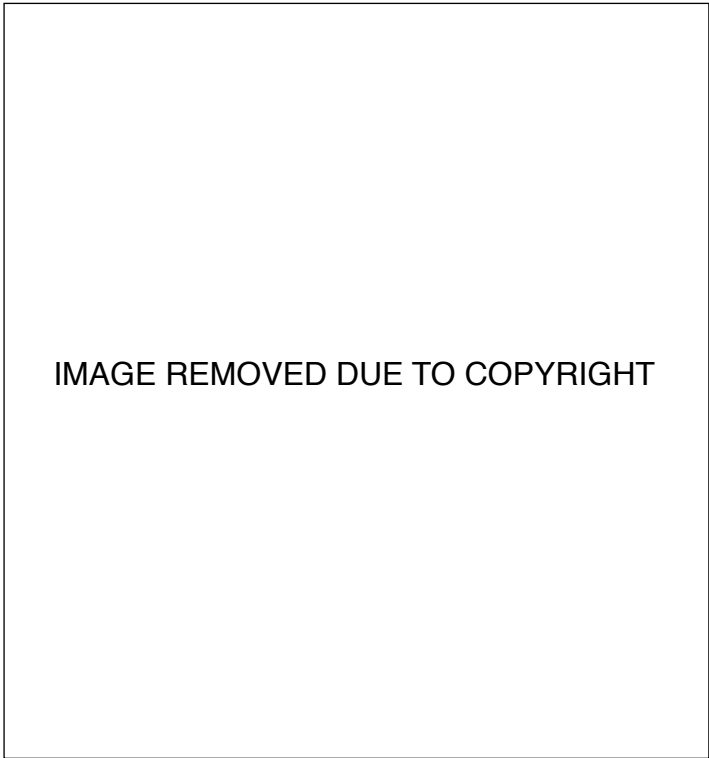


Figure 10. Saarinen-Swanson Group case units, designed by Pipsan and Bob, released 1947 (1stDibs website)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 11. Gilbert Rohde chair (see Davies, *At Home in Manhattan*, 110) and Kurt Versen lamp (see *Interior Decorator* 97, no. 4, Nov. 1937, 23) in Eden residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 12. Saarinen-Swanson Group chairs and table, designed by Pipsan and Bob, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 13. Russel Wright chair (see Russel Wright Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Object ID 8119) in Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-37, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 14. Saarinen-Swanson Group chair, designed by Pipsan and Bob, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE  
TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 15. Nessen Studio lamp in Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-37, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection). Pipsan used the same model of lamp in the Eden residence, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (decorated 1940) and the Koebel residence, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (decorated 1940).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 16. Kurt Versen floor lamp in Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 17)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 17. Eden residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The cabinets and chests were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line with custom hardware.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 18. Koebel residence bedroom, original interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940 (later photograph), Grosse Pointe, Michigan (Michigan Architectural Foundation website). The chests were from the Flexible Home Arrangements line with custom hardware, also visible in ca. 1940 photographs in the Cranbrook Archives.



Figure 19. Eden residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The textile print was designed by Dan Cooper.

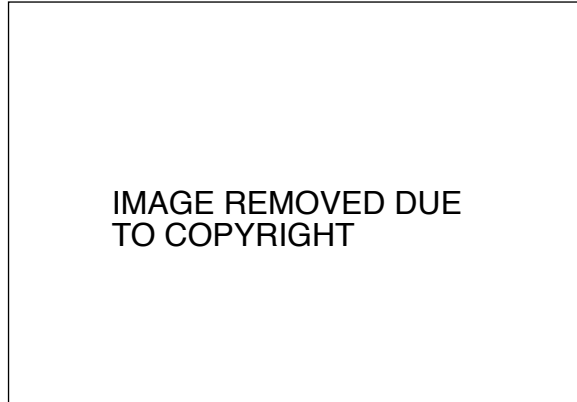


Figure 20. Koebel residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 17)

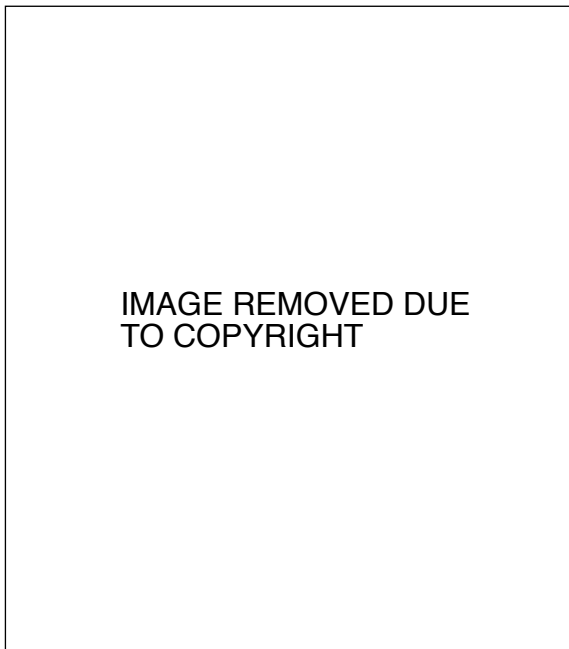


Figure 21. Calingaert residence hall, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-37, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

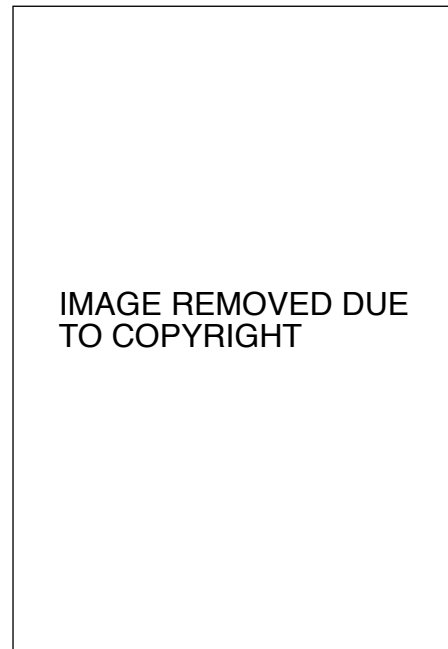


Figure 22. Saarinen-Swanson Group textiles, designed by Marianne Strengell, released 1947 (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 203)



Figure 23. Woven striped textile, designed by Pipsan, ca. 1930s (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saارين Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

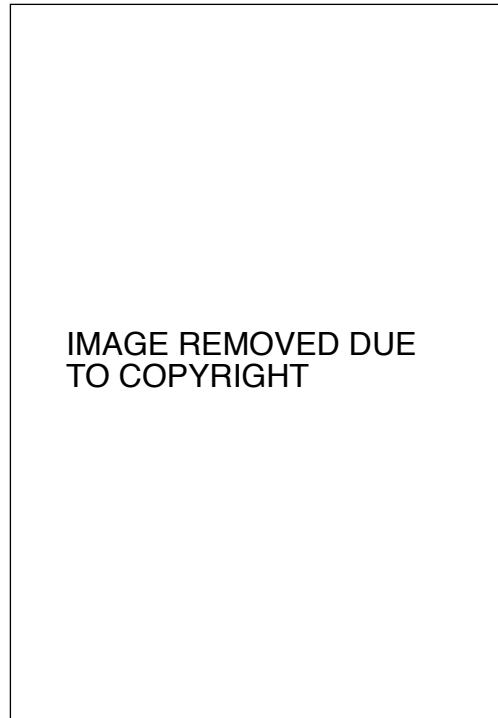


Figure 24. Saarinen-Swanson Group printed textile, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saارين Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

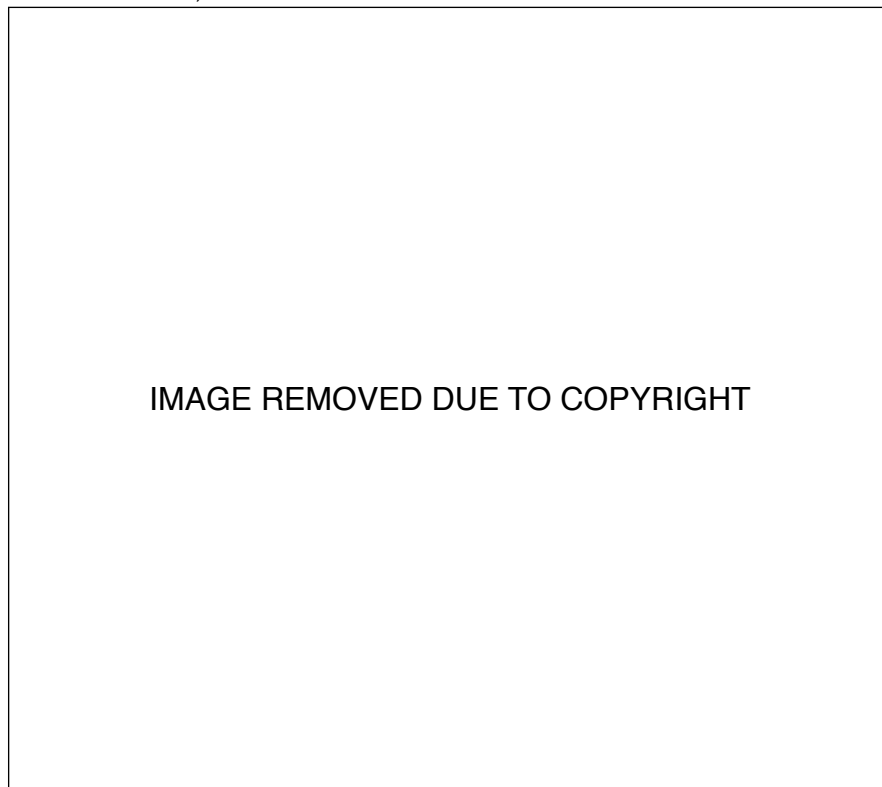


Figure 25. Saarinen-Swanson Group printed textiles, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 203)

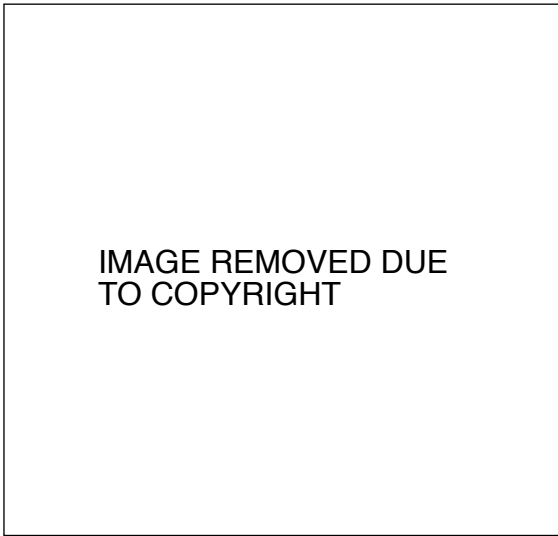


Figure 26. Printed textile, designed by Dan Cooper, 1940 (Yale Art Gallery website, 1950.759). Pipsan used this textile in the Eden residence pictured in figure 19.

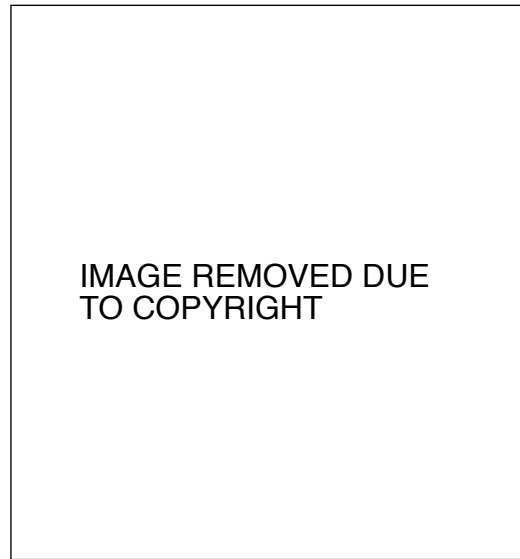


Figure 27. Saarinen-Swanson Group printed textile, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (Cooper Hewitt website, 2000-33-1)

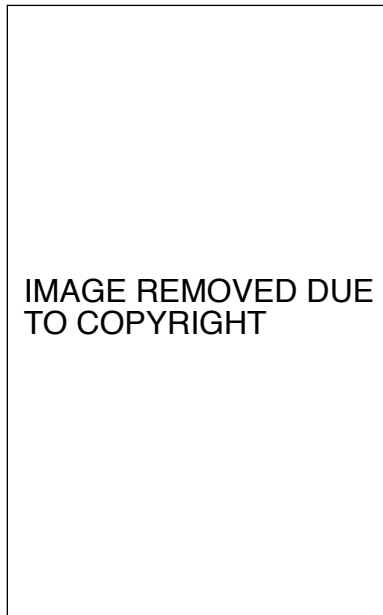


Figure 28. Rattan lamp in Koebel residence screened-in porch, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (*Interiors* 100, no. 12, July 1941, 14). In 1941-1942, Pipsan used a similar rattan lamp in the MacDonald apartments, Harbor Springs, Michigan (see chapter 4, figure 27).

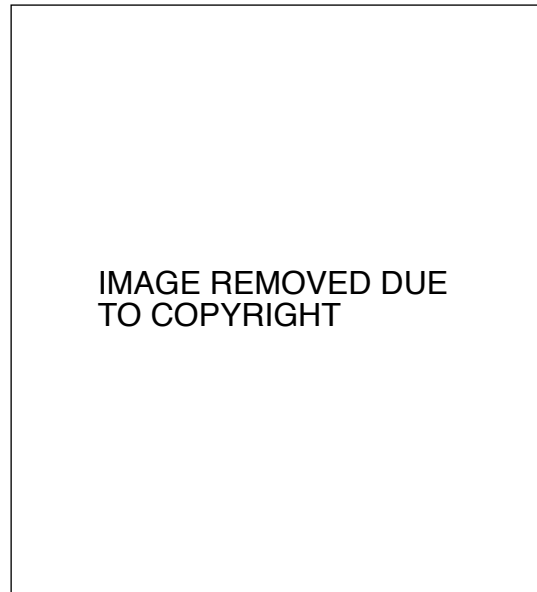


Figure 29. Rattan lamp in Eden residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 30. Saarinen-Swanson Group lamps, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



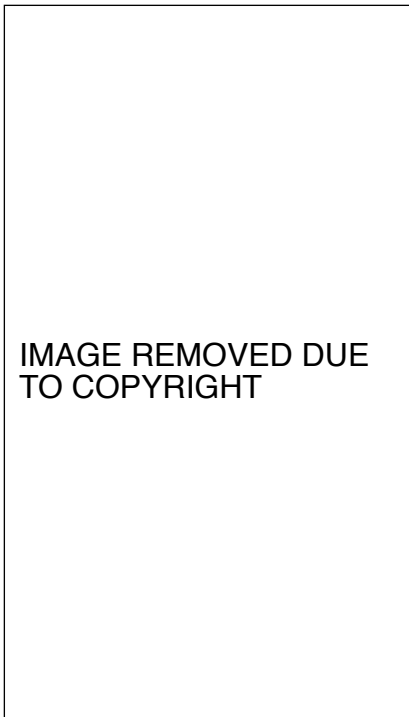


Figure 31. Saariinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saariinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

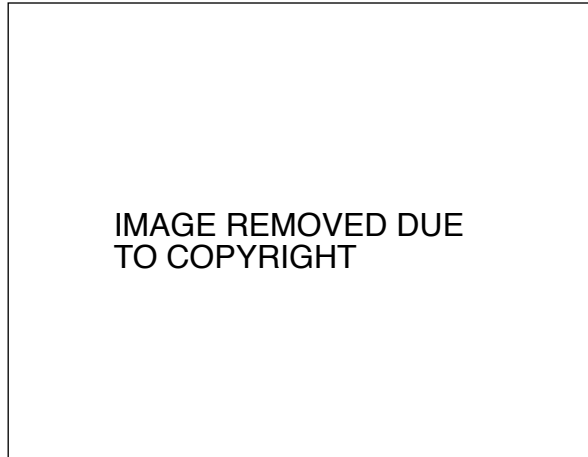


Figure 32. Saariinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saariinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

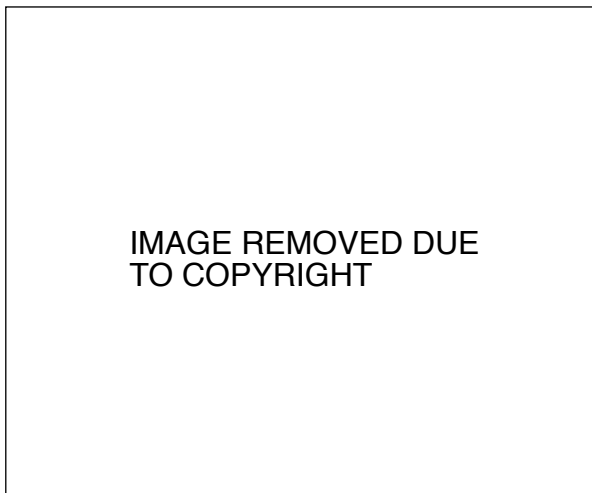


Figure 33. Saariinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saariinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

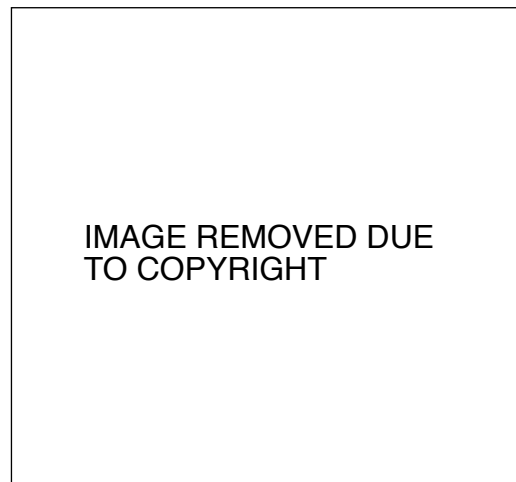


Figure 34. Saariinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Benjamin Baldwin, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saariinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 35. Lamp, designed by Benjamin Baldwin and Harry Weese, ca. 1940 (Museum of Modern Art website, 839.1942)

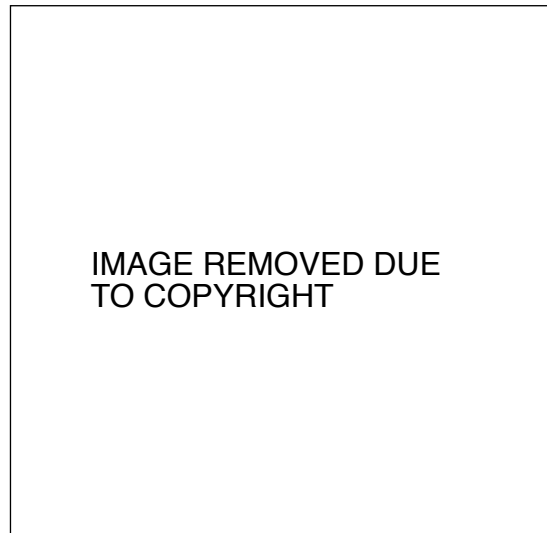


Figure 36. The lamp design from figure 35, pictured in Saารinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saารinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

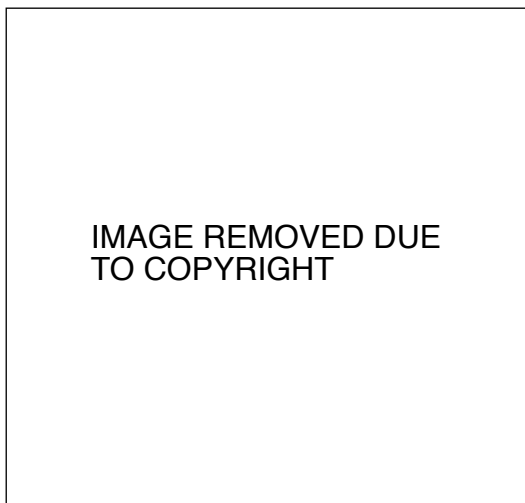


Figure 37. Glass vase in Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

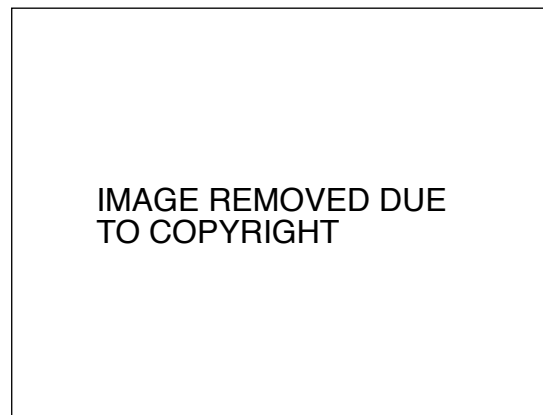


Figure 38. Glass vase in Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

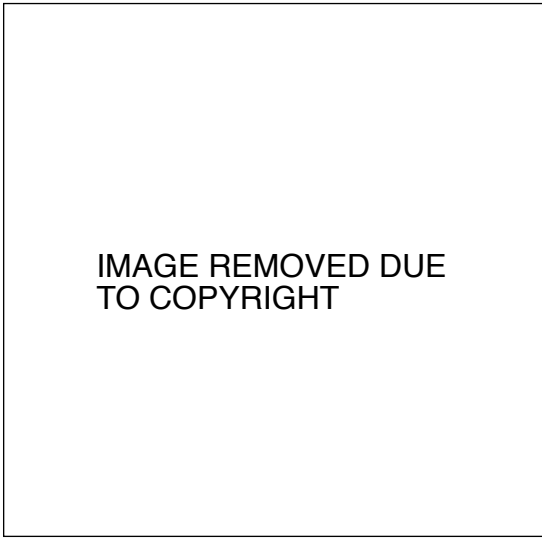


Figure 39. Glass vase in Koebel residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

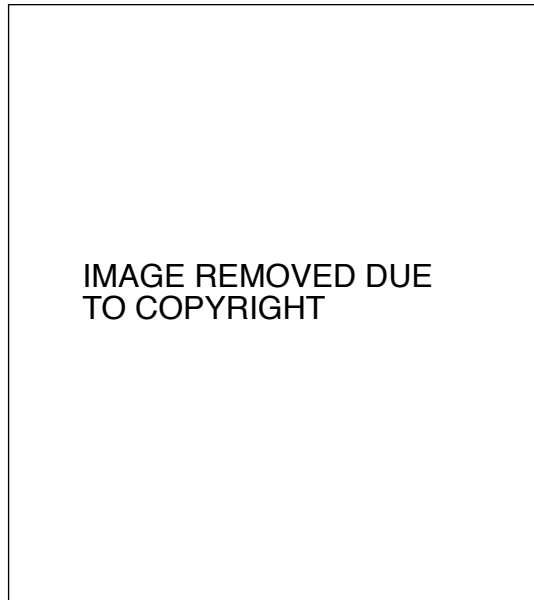


Figure 40. Glass vessel in Eden residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 41. Glass vase in Eden residence dining room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 42. Saارينen-Swanson Group glass flower holder, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (Cooper Hewitt website, 2000-16-1)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 43. Saarinen-Swanson Group glass vessels, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (*Interiors* 107, no. 3, Oct. 1947, 113)

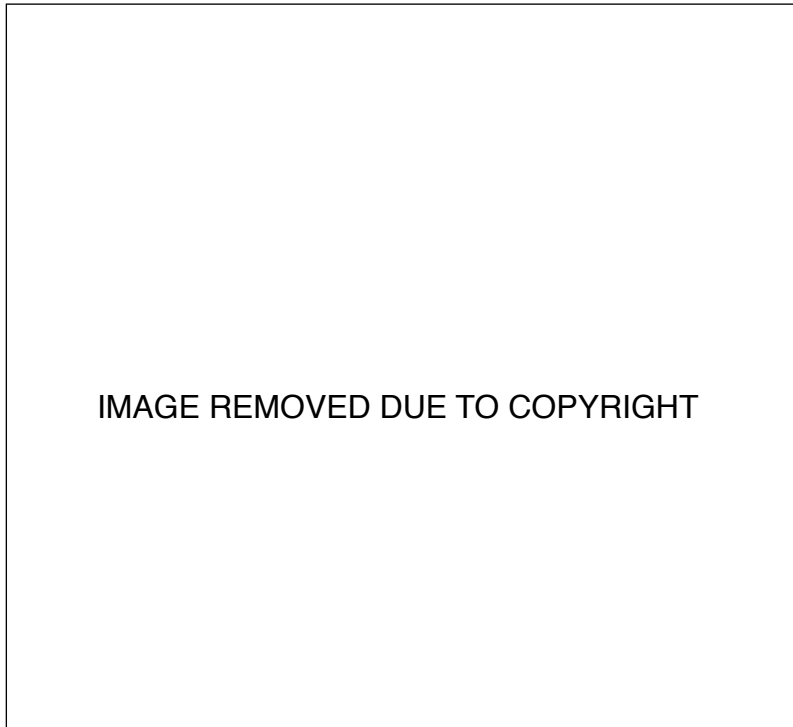


Figure 44. Saarinen-Swanson Group glassware, designed by Pipsan, released ca. 1947 (Cranbrook Art Museum, 1981. 70.A–D)



Figure 45. Saarinen-Swanson Group glass vase, designed by Pipsan, released by 1948 (O’Kane, *Tiffin Glassmasters: The Modern Years*, 69)



Figure 46. Saارينen-Swanson Group metal vase, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 153)

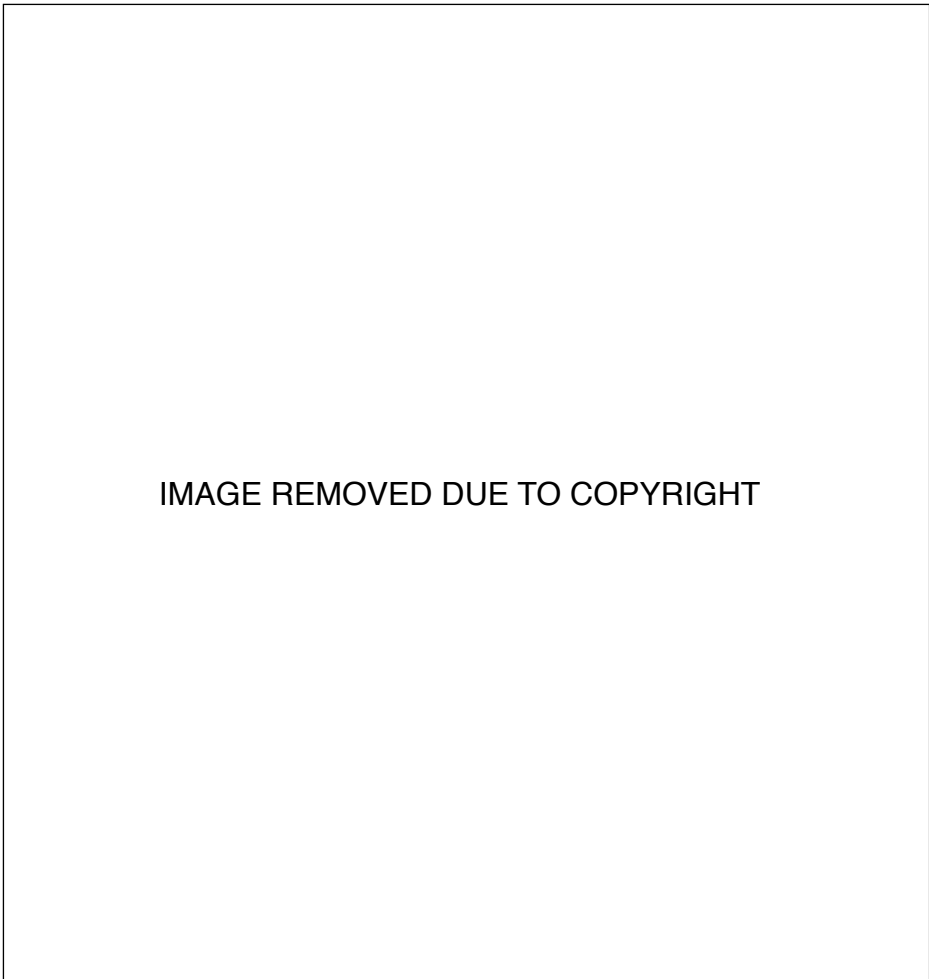


Figure 47. Metal vessels in Calingaert residence living room, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

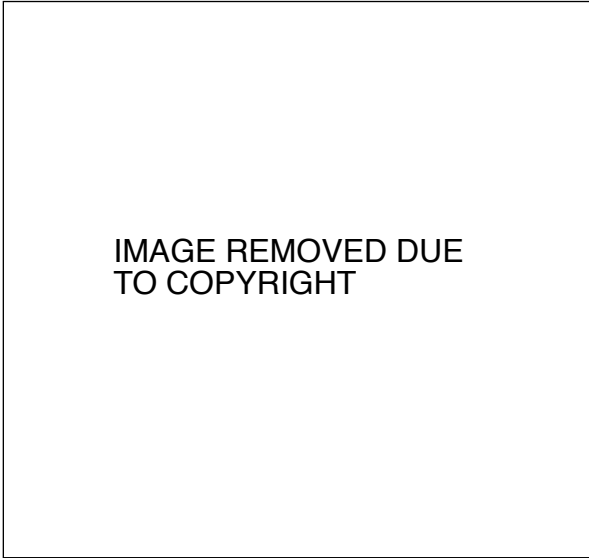


Figure 48. Metal vase in model living room designed by Pipsan and Bob, displayed at the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, 1935, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)



Figure 49. Candelabrum and flower holder, designed by Bob, included in the Saarinen-Swanson Group, released 1947 (Cranbrook Art Museum website, ZO 1979.4)



Figure 50. Fireplace tools, designed by Bob, included in the Saarinen-Swanson Group, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 51. Andirons, designed by Bob, included in the Saarinen-Swanson Group, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 52. Figural sculpture in model living room designed by Pipsan and Bob, displayed at the *Exhibition of Home Furnishings*, 1935, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)



Figure 53. Animal sculptures in Calingaert residence bedroom, interior decorating by Pipsan, ca. 1936-1937, Detroit, Michigan (Cranbrook Archives Digital Collection)

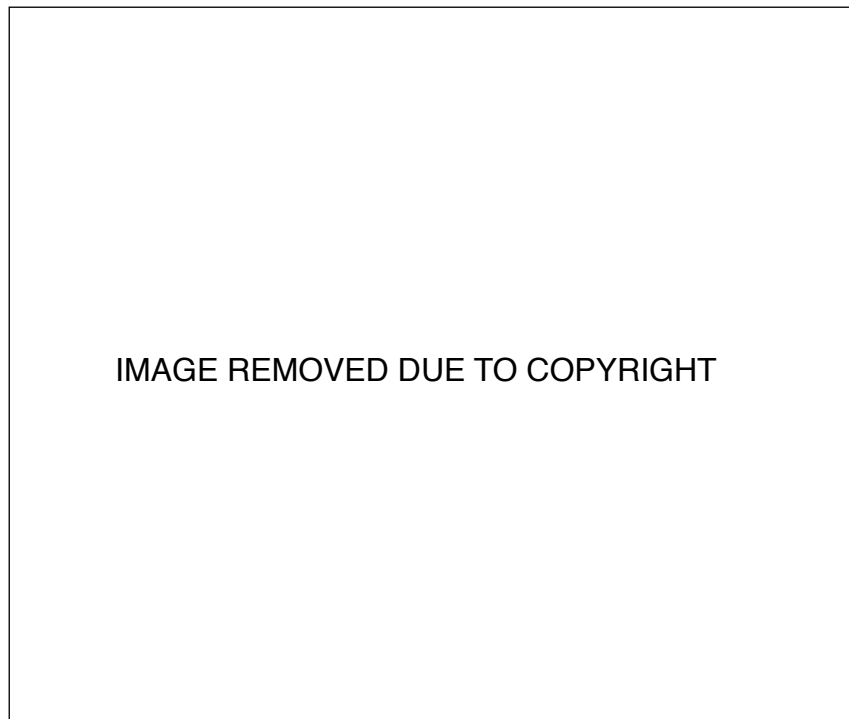


Figure 54. Sculptures, designed and made by Lilian Swann, for Koebel residence dining room, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (Michigan Architectural Foundation website). The sculptures are partially visible in figure 45 of chapter 3.



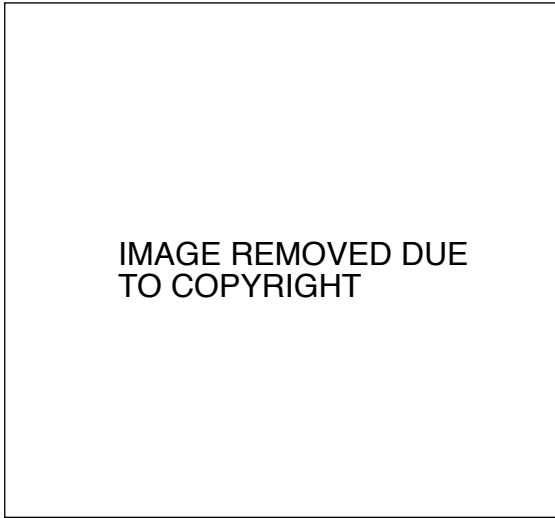


Figure 55. Sculpture, designed and made by Charles Dusenbury, displayed in Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, J. L. Hudson Company department store, Detroit, Michigan (*House & Garden*, Oct. 1947, 155)

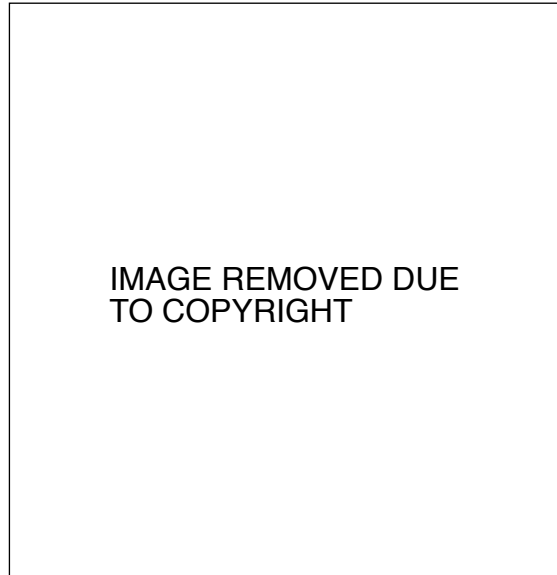


Figure 56. Saarinen-Swanson Group ceramics, designed by Lydia Winston, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 57. Saarinen-Swanson Group ceramics, designed by Lydia Winston, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

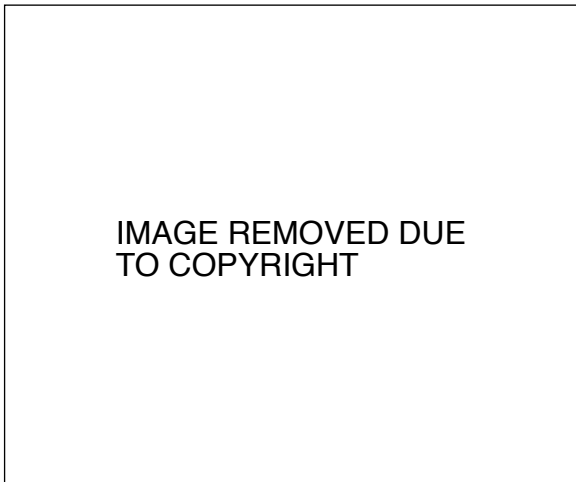


Figure 58. Saarinen-Swanson Group ceramic dinnerware, designed by Lydia Winston, Saarinen-Swanson Group textiles, designed by Marianne Strengell, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

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Figure 59. Saarinen-Swanson Group glass vase, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (*Interiors* 107, no. 3, Oct. 1947, 113). This vase was displayed at *An Exhibition for Modern Living*, 1949, Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan, and pictured in Edgar Kaufmann Jr.'s 1950 book *What is Modern Design?*

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 60. Candelabrum, designed by Pipsan for Cray of Boston, 1948 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives). The candelabrum won an Honorable Mention award from the American Institute of Decorators in 1948.

## Chapter 6: The Arts and Crafts Movement Fulfilled?

Marketing and press material on the Saarinen-Swanson Group portrayed the line as a happy marriage of handwork and industry. Publicity highlighted the designers' connections to Cranbrook, which was founded in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement and provided a breeding ground for innovative post-war design. While valorising handcraft, modern industry, and interior furnishings, the brand identity of the Saarinen-Swanson Group upheld established hierarchies between art, craft, industrial design, and interior decorating. Central to the brand identity was the notion that the furnishings line fostered individuality: the line preserved the individuality of each contributing designer and also promised to nurture the individuality of consumers who furnished their homes with the products. Marketing and press material claimed that interiors decorated with the furnishings would be harmonious because the line was a result of teamwork and shared values among the individual designers. Qualities highlighted throughout the marketing were ones heavily promoted by business and political elites in the late 1940s as defining features of American culture.

### The Cranbrook legacy

In the late 1940s, the Cranbrook Academy of Art was associated with some of the newer names in progressive post-war design, including Eero, Charles Eames, Florence Knoll, and others who had studied or taught there ten years earlier under Eliel. To associate the Saarinen-Swanson Group with this elite vanguard, marketing and press material pointed out that all contributing designers were connected to Cranbrook.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge Ideally in Saarinen-Swanson Modern," *House & Garden*, 152, 156-57; "Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson," *Interiors* 107, no. 3 (Oct. 1947): 150; "General Session Evening May 5," script, 5 May 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP; Mary Roche, "Room Designers Exhibit Settings," *New York Times*, 2 Oct. 1947; Florence Davies, "For Use and Beauty: Artist Group Creates Home Backgrounds," *Detroit News*, 23 Feb. 1947; "Michigan Designs Modern in the Saarinen-Swanson Group," Hudson's Training Department booklet, Oct. 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP.

Although Eliel was not directly involved in the Saarinen-Swanson Group, his reputation was nonetheless relied on in the line's brand identity by associating it with Cranbrook. When founded, Cranbrook was immersed in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement. George Gough Booth and Eliel both believed that artists, designers, and craftspeople benefited from living and working near each other, and that the fruits of such creative enclaves aided the wider community. Both men identified a need in the modern world for beautiful and high-quality everyday objects and homes that were completely designed.<sup>2</sup> According to Saarinen-Swanson Group press, there remained a need in post-war America for high-quality, mass-produced design in a more accessible price point than handcrafted furnishings.<sup>3</sup> The title of a *Detroit News* article by art critic Florence Davies, "For Use and Beauty," evoked the Arts and Crafts aim to create useful and beautiful objects for the home.<sup>4</sup> The words "use" and "beauty" alluded to William Morris's oft-repeated advice to "have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."<sup>5</sup> In the *Detroit News*, Davies detailed the Saarinen-Swanson Group's lofty mission, the line's connection to Cranbrook, and Cranbrook's Arts and Crafts origins:

This is not officially a Cranbrook project. That should be made plain. However, in a very important way it is much more than that. It is the fulfillment of a twenty-five-year-old dream which was and is Cranbrook. Even before he founded the Cranbrook Academy of Art, George G. Booth was seeking to find ways and means to raise the standard of beauty of things used in every day [*sic*] life.... As an art collector he owned and enjoyed many beautiful works of art, but it has been his life-long contention that art is not merely something to paint and hang on the wall. He believed that art belonged in the houses people build and live in, the chairs they sit in, the drinking glass on the table. Eliel Saarinen, the architect whom he asked to become president of Cranbrook, shared this belief. How often this writer has heard this artist plead for art as a way of life, an expression of honesty in design and in the use of materials for daily living. Today this group of designers is making this long-time vision come true.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty."

<sup>4</sup> Davies.

<sup>5</sup> William Morris quoted in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 648.

<sup>6</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty."

Davies went so far as to suggest that the Saarinen-Swanson Group fulfilled the Arts and Crafts agenda spearheaded by Eliel and Booth at Cranbrook decades earlier. Ostensibly, the furnishings line achieved Cranbrook's long-held ambition to elevate everyday objects to the status of art through honest design and materials. The Arts and Crafts Movement was alluded to in other press and marketing material, which described the line as possessing "honesty of design," with products created for "the customer of today who demands beauty along with utility."<sup>7</sup>

Following an Arts and Crafts aim especially associated with the movement's American iteration, the Saarinen-Swanson Group allegedly united traditional handwork and modern industry.<sup>8</sup> According to press material, designers like Marianne Strengell and Lydia Winston, because of their training in hand skills and their intimate knowledge of their media, were able to study and design for mechanized production while ensuring that a handcrafted quality was preserved.<sup>9</sup> Publicity photographs pictured Winston in her studio grinding materials for glazes and Strengell at the loom, demonstrating the handwork that was behind the mass-produced products (figs. 1-2).

Marketing and press material explained that Strengell's textiles, made of modern fibres like Celanese (a brand of acetate) and rayon, were designed on hand looms for power-loom production in order "to keep the feeling and appearance" of hand-woven textiles (figs. 3-4).<sup>10</sup> The result brought "the beauty and lux of hand-woven fabrics within the reach of an average customer."<sup>11</sup> Buyers and customers were reminded that the handcraft-imbued textiles were nonetheless modern through

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<sup>7</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 152; "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group at the Johnson Furniture Co. Showroom, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Given by Margot Schuyler, Administrative Co-ordinator [sic]" script, 5 June 1947, box 3, folder 8, SP. See also Hudson's training booklet, n.p.

<sup>8</sup> Eileen Boris, "Dreams of Brotherhood and Beauty: The Social Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *The Art that is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1998), 211-12; David Cathers, "The East Coast: 'Enterprise on a Higher Plane,'" in *International Arts and Crafts*, 146-63.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty."

<sup>10</sup> Eugenia Sheppard, "For Modern Living," *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 Sept. 1947; "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 203, 221; Hudson's training booklet, n.p.

<sup>11</sup> "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group." See also Hudson's training booklet, n.p.

names such as One Plus, Calculus, Abacus, Tangent, Rhombus, Linear—all “mathematical” words that bestowed a sense of precision and logic onto products.<sup>12</sup>

Winston’s ceramic dinnerware was likewise mass-produced but, according to marketing material, because she worked closely with the factories that made the products, they retained the high quality and appearance of her handcrafted ceramics.<sup>13</sup> The earthy light-brown-coloured body and irregular cream glaze looked as if it had been wiped off the rims and high points by hand (fig. 4).

Pipsan’s glassware was described as “craftsman made” despite being mass produced.<sup>14</sup> Her “hand-screened” textiles had a hand-drawn, painterly appearance and were printed on a light-beige fabric with slubs and dark flecks in the yarn that imparted a natural appearance (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> Marketing and press described the fabric as “linen-type” and “like linen,” evoking a textured, natural fabric made of an ancient fibre, even though it was in fact made of a semi-synthetic blend of rayon, cotton, and mohair.<sup>16</sup> The lamps Pipsan designed brought together materials associated with modern industry with ones associated handcraft: the bases were made of tubular grey metal, accented with natural-looking materials like “hemp twine” and “parchment” or textile shades (figs. 6-7).<sup>17</sup> While less was made of the handcraft-industry union in the furniture than the other products, marketing pointed out that Fritz Mueller of Mueller Furniture Co. (the manufacturer of the upholstered furniture) worked closely with Pipsan and Bob in order to develop new production methods to achieve new forms using new materials.<sup>18</sup> Design reformers associated with the Arts and Crafts

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<sup>12</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 203. See also Hudson’s training booklet, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; Hudson’s training booklet, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Hudson’s training booklet, n.p.

<sup>15</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group;” “General Session;” Roche, “Room Designers.” See also Hudson’s training booklet, n.p.

<sup>16</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 220; “General Session.”

<sup>17</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 225.

<sup>18</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group.”

Movement had believed that such a close relationship between designers and manufacturers would lead to better quality goods at affordable prices.<sup>19</sup>

Marketing and press boasted of the large number of manufacturers and designers involved in the Saarinen-Swanson Group.<sup>20</sup> In this arrangement, the designer was portrayed as the guiding hand of technology and, in turn, technology was the way to make art accessible to many.

The emphasis on handcraft in the publicity exemplifies the post-war Craft Revival. In furnishings design, the trend entailed modern products that incorporated traditional materials and a hand-made look. Such elements were believed to humanize the simple forms and industrial materials that had characterized some earlier forms of modern design, especially the International Style, which, to many, appeared cold and inhospitable. As a corrective, manufacturers engaged so-called designer-craftsmen. A designer-craftsman sometimes referred to an individual who possessed hand skills and provided manufacturers with handcrafted prototypes to be replicated using mass-production methods. A designer-craftsman also referred to a craftsperson engaged by a manufacturer to study mechanized production methods and design specifically for industrial manufacture.<sup>21</sup> The result, in many cases, including the Saarinen-Swanson Group, were furnishings that were described as liveable, alive, and comfortable; to a home, the products promised to impart a “human quality.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cathers, “The East Coast: ‘Enterprise on a Higher Plane,’” 153-60.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “Local Tieup for Saarinen,” *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 May 1947; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 152, 155, 156, 221; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 109, 150; “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group.”

<sup>21</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 152, 155; “Coordinated Interior Design: The Saarinen-Swanson Group,” *Architectural Record* 102, no. 5 (Nov. 1947): 78.

### Individuality, teamwork, shared values, and harmony

The concept of individuality was central to the Saarinen-Swanson Group brand identity. Marketing and press material touted the individuality of the contributing designers, stressing the creative freedom that each was given. *House & Garden* explained, “Individualists all, [the Saarinen-Swanson Group designers] work together to create furnishings that meet the needs of the modern home.”<sup>23</sup> *Interiors* made a similar claim: “Though completely integrated for use in the contemporary home, [the Saarinen-Swanson Group furnishings] are spared a monotonous sameness by the imaginative individuality of their creators.”<sup>24</sup> Press detailed each participant’s background and expertise, and three publications featured photographs of the designers, reifying the people behind the products.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, each designers’ role in the Saarinen-Swanson Group was clearly delineated.<sup>26</sup> Except for the furniture, which Pipsan and Bob co-designed, each product was designed by one person rather than multiple people working together. By fostering the individuality of each designer, potential consumers were in turn presented with an expressive, diverse group of furnishings that offered them choice and flexibility to express their own individuality in their homes. The Saarinen-Swanson Group was celebrated for creating “backgrounds for living” in which “neither the colors nor the furnishings will ever dominate the people who live with them.”<sup>27</sup>

Marketing and press portrayed the Saarinen-Swanson Group as a collaborative, “joint endeavor” of individuals who cooperated, worked together, and pooled their talents.<sup>28</sup> The designers were of “the same point of view,” all committed to the same “cause”—that is, collaborating with

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<sup>23</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 156. See also Davies, “For Use and Beauty.”

<sup>24</sup> “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 109.

<sup>25</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; Sheppard, “For Modern Living”; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 156-57; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 150-54; Hudson’s training booklet, n.p.; Hudson’s advertisement, *Detroit Free Press*, 28 Sept. 1947.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 152; See also Davies, “For Use and Beauty.”

<sup>28</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 152, 156.



industry to make “beautiful and satisfying home backgrounds... available for everyone.”<sup>29</sup> Because the designers espoused the same “living philosophy,” the products on the “inclusive” line “completely coordinated” and “integrated” with each other.<sup>30</sup> Customers could rest assured that they could choose any number of items from the line and the furnishings would “go together.”<sup>31</sup> Together, the work of the different individuals created harmony when combined in an interior; the contrasting textures and colours of the various furnishings were claimed to make the group as a whole interesting.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on harmony and teamwork suggested that, the designers’ work, when brought together, created something more beautiful than each individuals’ work on its own. *House & Garden* put it this way: “A good room is the sum of its parts.”<sup>33</sup>

The rhetoric in Saarinen-Swanson Group marketing resembled language that cultural and political elites had used in recent years to attempt to define shared American values. Historian Wendy Wall has shown that in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, many such elites believed national unity was crucial to defeat totalitarianism. They insisted that internal conflict would weaken the country’s defences against foreign, undemocratic forces. In effort to encourage national cohesion, writers, intellectuals, anthropologists, government officials, and civic and religious leaders all promoted the notion that America was defined and united by its diversity. According to these elites, fascism and communism stifled individuality and forced homogeneity, whereas American democracy nurtured class, religious, ethnic, and racial difference. This conceit was widely circulated in various formats. In 1938 to 1939, the Federal Radio Project broadcast a series called *Americans All—Immigrants All*, which highlighted admirable qualities that different national and ethnic groups

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<sup>29</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “General Session”; Sheppard, “For Modern Living.”

<sup>30</sup> “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 109; “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “General Session”; Sheppard, “For Modern Living.”

<sup>31</sup> Hudson’s training booklet, n.p. See also Davies, “For Use and Beauty.”

<sup>32</sup> “General Session”; Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “Coordinated Interior Design,” 78.

<sup>33</sup> “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 155.

contributed to American culture. In academic lectures across the country from 1939 to 1940, prominent journalist Louis Adamic advanced the notion that America was a “nation of nations” united and made great by its diversity. At the New York World’s Fair in 1940, an “American Common” pavilion rotated exhibitions and performances put on by different ethnic groups in the United States. Many other books, mass-media articles, popular songs, films, and plays proselytized the belief that what made the country special—and what was worth uniting on—was that both groups and individuals chose to live and work together in harmony. In other words, this exceptional country was the sum of its parts.<sup>34</sup>

Central to this vision of America was the individuality of its citizens. Historians have shown that from the 1930s and into the post-war years, however, individuality in American culture came under increasing scrutiny. Philosopher John Dewey had warned in 1939 that American democracy was threatened by a conformist tendency in American culture similar to that which had taken root in Germany and Italy and gave rise to fascism.<sup>35</sup> Victory over the Axis powers in 1945 did not safeguard individuality. Rather, with the onset of the Cold War and the spread of Stalin’s power across Europe, the focus of anti-individualist concern shifted from fascism to communism. By early 1947, the Harry Truman administration made anticommunism official foreign policy while the FBI and the House Un-American Activities Committee (formed in 1938) doubled down on efforts to expose communists supposedly working covertly at home to overthrow American democracy.<sup>36</sup>

It was not just totalitarian governments that were seen as a threat to American individualism. In the late 1940s and increasingly over the next decade, popular writers questioned the effects of American social, cultural, and economic institutions on the self. For example, in 1946, Rabbi Joshua

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<sup>34</sup> See Wall, *Inventing the “American Way,”* 64-100.

<sup>35</sup> K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 100.

<sup>36</sup> On anticommunism in the late 1940s, see Cynthia Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2003) and Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 191-233.

Loth Liebman published his self-help book *Peace of Mind*, in which he warned that American society was crushing individualism and cautioned readers to resist conformity. The book spent fifty-eight weeks as the number-one nonfiction book on the *New York Times* Bestsellers List. Another self-help book by renowned lecturer Dale Carnegie, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, published in 1948, similarly advised readers to avoid imitating others. *Harper's* magazine writer John McPartland chastised readers in 1947 for succumbing to the manipulative tactics of the advertising world and consuming products mindlessly. More and more, widely read authors pronounced the rise of corporate businesses, unprecedented industrial manufacture, various forms of mass culture, and the growth of suburbia and all that it entailed—including decorating trends—as homogenizing forces that had come to dominate American culture.<sup>37</sup>

Historian Wendy Wall argues that any semblance of “unity in diversity” in American culture was shattered in the immediate post-war years by a nation-wide outburst of violence and discrimination towards black Americans as well as Japanese- and Chinese-Americans. At the same time, workers in the country’s biggest industries demanded higher wages, job security, and better hours. When their requests were left unmet, the largest wave of strikes in United States history rippled across the nation. Between November 1945 and June 1946, more than three million workers participated in strikes. The glaring disunity between classes, races, ethnic groups, as well as religious groups posed a problem for corporate elites. Labour unrest disrupted business operations and thereby profits. Social conflict was also thought to make the country susceptible to communism and give American democratic capitalism a negative image abroad.<sup>38</sup> This turmoil erupted out of

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<sup>37</sup> See Cuordileone, *Manhood*, 98-105; Irene Taviss Thomson, “From Conflict to Embedment: The Individual-Self Relationship, 1930-1991,” *Sociological Forum* 12, no. 4 (1997): 632-38; Matthew Dunne, *Cold War State of Mind: Brainwashing and Postwar American Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 181-210.

<sup>38</sup> See Wall, *Inventing the “American Way,”* 168-72.

American society at the same time increasing numbers of prominent intellectuals were voicing concerns about the impact of corporations on individualism.

This was all bad for business. In response, a group of advertising and media executives from the country's largest companies, including *Time* and *Look* magazines, the *Washington Post*, and NBC, ABC, and CBS, established the Advertising Council. Wall's research has shown that the Council's goal was to combat the negative image of corporate America and quell social unrest by re-selling the public on the idea that Americans shared certain core values. Starting in 1946, the Council ran a series of campaigns that were presented as "public service" announcements printed in magazines, newspapers, and public advertisements (e.g., billboards, shop window displays, and posters on public transportation) and broadcast on television and radio networks. The Council also provided publishers and networks with "fact sheets" and talking points to incorporate in editorial and news articles and in fictional programming through plots and dialogue. Although the campaign messages were delivered to the public in a range of formats, in the late 1940s the most popular channel was radio, with a reported 831 million "listener impressions" in 1947 alone. The Advertising Council's campaigns repeated the same themes. They celebrated individuality in order to discourage prejudice and intergroup hostility. Campaigns stressed that harmony and teamwork, among workers and between workers and management, unleashed the fruits of the American economy for all. The message was, if the country unified to espouse these values, democracy would be protected, the country's reputation abroad would be strengthened, and the spread of communism would be stalled.<sup>39</sup>

These campaigns had an enormous reach, enjoying the support of the national media and government. The Advertising Council was, in fact, a reorganization of the War Advertising Council—the wartime government organization in charge of garnering public support for federal

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<sup>39</sup> See Wall, 172-97.

programs. After the war, the Council renamed itself and became a private non-profit foundation, yet it continued to enjoy close contact with and support from the Truman administration. It was in the government's interest to bolster the image of American democratic capitalism at home and abroad. To succeed, the Advertising Council's "public service" campaigns also required the support of the national media. Backing from certain major companies was guaranteed since their executives were committee members and directors on the Council. Others, such as *Life* and *Fortune*, donated advertising space and ran editorials and news stories that included content specified by the Council. Such companies complied because the Council promised them that, even though the campaigns would help "build a peaceful world," the Council ultimately represented the "voice of business."<sup>40</sup>

Design historians Glenn Adamson and Donald Albrecht have argued that the post-war Craft Revival, and the impression of individuality it lent products and interiors, countered what many saw as increasing conformism in American culture; moreover, the fortuitous union between the hand and the machine testified to the superiority of American industry (and by extension American democracy) over that of the Soviet Union, with its authoritarian government and less productive industry.<sup>41</sup> Craft and all that it implied helped to positively define the brand identity of a mass-produced furnishings line like the Saarinen-Swanson Group, especially since the line, as well as Cranbrook, were born outside Detroit. There took place the first and largest major strike of the post-war wave—at General Motors, which began in November 1945 and lasted 113 days.<sup>42</sup> At the time, General Motors was an architectural client of Eliel, Bob, and Eero's.<sup>43</sup> During the war, when many workers had promised not to strike until the fighting ended, Detroit was a national hotbed of

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<sup>40</sup> See Wall, 163-97.

<sup>41</sup> Adamson, "Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement," 32-33; Albrecht, "The Hand that Helped the Machine," 84.

<sup>42</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 232-34.

<sup>43</sup> Christ-Janer, *Eliel Saarinen*, 140.

labour unrest. In 1944, 25% of all struck workers in the country were Michigan employees.<sup>44</sup> Some wartime Detroit strikes were led by black workers in response to discrimination in the workplace, yet most were initiated by white workers in retaliation of black workers gaining employment or raises.<sup>45</sup> Conflict sometimes poured onto the streets, culminating in the infamous 1943 Detroit race riot, which was only quelled after Roosevelt sent in 6,000 federal troops. By the late 1940s, it was hard to see unity in diversity in Detroit, perhaps more than any other city in the country. The mid-1940s revealed flaws in society that echoed concerns that Arts and Crafts adherents tried to address a half century earlier: a disjunction between labour and capital, a degradation of society, and a loss of individuality—all issues surrounding industrial manufacture.

The marketing and press on the Saarinen-Swanson Group seemed to anticipate apprehensions potential consumers may have had about the new line. The brand identity conveyed that this mass-produced product line fostered individuality rather than stifled it. Publicity borrowed the language of elites about unity in diversity, teamwork, and harmony as shared American values to give the impression that these factory-made furnishings were not products of discontented workers or violence. In the Saarinen-Swanson Group version of unity in diversity, the notion of diversity was trivialized. Rather than racial, ethnic, religious, or class diversity, the home furnishings line delivered aesthetic diversity. Yet, by purchasing the Saarinen-Swanson Group products and bringing them into their home, consumers could feel like they were expressing their own individuality all the while contributing to the righteous effort of strengthening democracy at home and abroad.

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<sup>44</sup> Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>45</sup> Ziegler, 154-55; Lichtenstein, *Most Dangerous Man*, 207-8.

### Art, craft, industrial design, and interior decorating

While emphasizing the handcrafted quality and appearance of Saarinen-Swanson Group products, marketing and press clarified that the line's designers were not to be confused with a group of unintellectual craftspeople. In the *Detroit News*, Davies made this plain: "This is not a joint workshop idea. It does not represent the creative thinking of any one person, with other craftsmen carrying out his ideas."<sup>46</sup> Davies equated craftsmen with mechanical workers who executed someone else's plan. She went on to clarify that the Saarinen-Swanson Group "is a group of artists who approach the decorative arts from much the same point of view... but each [designer is] an individual and an artist in his own right."<sup>47</sup> Davies' insistence that the Saarinen-Swanson Group designers were artists was repeated in other marketing and press. The designers were described as members of the "celebrated artist colony of the Cranbrook Academy of Art," and the furnishings line was called a "living philosophy of six artists."<sup>48</sup> This distinction between an artist and a craftsman had roots in the Early Modern period, when artists began to be viewed as autonomous creators, distinct from craftspeople, who merely possessed the manual skills to copy or execute a plan, while lacking the intellectual capacity to generate original ideas.<sup>49</sup> In the post-war period, although handcraft was seen as a desirable feature in post-war design, the figure of the craftsman could also imply a provincial, lower-class artisan steeped in dying traditions.<sup>50</sup> Advocates of the Saarinen-Swanson Group did not want the line's designers to be confused with this type of production.

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<sup>46</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty."

<sup>47</sup> Davies.

<sup>48</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 152; "General Session."

<sup>49</sup> See Larry E. Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Adamson, "Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement," 33-34; Caroline M. Hannah, "An Exploding Craft Market: 1945-1969," in *Crafting Modernism*, 120.

At least one Saarinen-Swanson Group designer was keenly aware of the hierarchies of making at this time. Strengell believed that “fine art” and “crafts” were separate categories in the mid-twentieth century. Fine art encompassed painting and sculpture, and the work she did at Cranbrook in the weaving department was considered craft. While Strengell felt the two categories existed at Cranbrook, she believed fine art was not valued more than craft there, which she attributed to Eliel’s influence. Nonetheless, Strengell herself appeared to view craftspeople as below her own social standing. She was adamant that she herself was a designer. Although she designed her textiles using a handloom and she made samples, others fabricated the finished products. When asked if she wove her textiles herself, she responded, “Well, of course I didn’t weave it myself; I had weavers.... I have always been a designer, not a weaver. I mean, I don’t do the manual part of it.”<sup>51</sup> Strengell’s comments on fine art, craft, and design further suggest that handcraft, practiced as an isolated activity instead of as an auxiliary to the design process, could easily be mistaken for lower-status labour. On the contrary, the brand identity of the Saarinen-Swanson Group framed its designers as autonomous creators who also possessed an intimate understanding of and, often, practical experience with their media. Calling the members artists was a reminder that they were academically trained rather than labourers; highlighting their connection to Cranbrook also served this end, because Cranbrook was a respected graduate-degree-granting school whose faculty and alumni had aesthetic training as well as hand skills. Such formal education was long associated with intellectual training, unlike traditional handcraft training such as apprenticeship.

The stereotypical fine artist prioritized beauty and individual expression before profit. This image, paired with the handcrafted quality of Saarinen-Swanson Group products, helped distance the line from consumerism. In the *Detroit News*, Davies elucidated just how un-commercial the

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<sup>51</sup> Marianne Strengell, interview by Robert F. Brown, Director, Boston office of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 8 Jan., 18 March, and 16 Dec. 1982, AAASI.



Saarinen-Swanson Group designers were: “This is not a drawing board procedure, by which a designer without any first-hand feeling for a material dreams up a handsome pattern and turns it over to a factory. Instead each artist knows and works in his own chosen medium.”<sup>52</sup> Here Davies distinguished the Saarinen-Swanson Group designers from the industrial designers, also called stylists, who were accused of engaging only superficially in product design by devising modern-looking shells for products. This approach, focused on appearance, aimed to seduce consumers with novelty so they would buy new products season after season out of desire more than need. Tactics that appealed to consumers’ emotions had been adopted by designers in the late 1920s, inspired by practices used in the advertising and fashion industries.<sup>53</sup> Such manipulative methods were denounced by vocal advocates of modern design into the 1940s. *House Beautiful* editors and MoMA curators, for instance, railed against “stylists” who engaged in “streamlined” or “modernistic” design. Such derisive terms were meant to flag a product as a pastiche of what the writers considered to be true modern design; they believed that “streamlined” or “modernistic” products possessed some superficial qualities associated with modern design (like new materials, geometric forms, and smooth surfaces) but did not uphold the true modernist designer’s commitment to timelessness, high quality, integration of form and function, and truth to materials.<sup>54</sup> The Saarinen-Swanson Group press conveyed that its designers, unlike stylists, had an intimate relationship with the objects they designed and the manufacturers that produced them. The journalist Edith Weigle of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* agreed that the group should not be confused with designers who focused on superficial appearances and profit: “This entire [Saarinen-Swanson Group] scheme is ambitious and

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<sup>52</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty.”

<sup>53</sup> See Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited*.

<sup>54</sup> “Do You Know the Difference between Modern and Modernistic,” *House Beautiful*, Oct. 1946, 134-35, 236-40; Elodie Courter, “Notes on the Exhibition,” in *Useful Objects Under Ten Dollars* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939), 4; *Useful Objects in Wartime*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 9-10. On MoMA’s interwar campaign against styling and modernistic design, see A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 84, 86, 99-100.

is so far removed from the tawdry, purely commercial type of furnishings with which the markets have been deluged for many years that it looks as if the American public is in for better days.”<sup>55</sup>

There was good reason to dissociate the Saarinen-Swanson Group from the “commercial type” stylists. The Swansons’ furniture bore similarities with the work of designers who engaged in the so-called modernistic style. Gilbert Rohde often used streamlining motifs like speed whiskers as well as tubular metal as a decorative element rather than in a manner that utilized the material’s particular structural potential. As discussed in chapter 4, Rohde’s work was similar to the Flexible Home Arrangements line, many pieces of which were included in the Saarinen-Swanson Group. When the Swansons expanded their furniture line in 1947, the new designs were more stylized than the original 1940 pieces, and as discussed in chapter 5, they were stylized in a manner of American industrial designers such as Paul Frankl, whose style was pronounced “modernistic” by *House Beautiful*.<sup>56</sup> The Saarinen-Swanson Group furniture possessed details associated with streamlining, such as the set of parallel lines on the foot board of some beds and tubular metal used as a decorative detail (fig. 8). Moreover, the furnishings line was in fact heavily marketing driven. Distancing the Saarinen-Swanson Group from industrial design, and instead promoting handcraft and artistry, helped take off the commercial edge. By calling the furnishings line a “living philosophy,” the Saarinen-Swanson Group was framed as a lofty, intellectual way of life rather than a package of commercial products.

The emphasis on artistry in marketing and press material also served to distance the group from femininity, amateurism, and interior decorating. Three out of the four most active designers—Pipsan, Strengell, and Winston—were women. As if to compensate for the uneven representation of the genders, the marketing amplified the relatively small roles of male designers. Although Baldwin’s

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<sup>55</sup> Edith Weigle, “Grand Rapids New Furniture Lures Buyers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1947.

<sup>56</sup> “Do You Know the Difference between Modern and Modernistic.” The article contains illustrations of “modernistic” designs that resemble Paul Frankl’s Skyscraper furniture and other designs. The article derides “stepped up bookcases.”

contribution was minimal, his involvement was announced in the debut presentation and several press articles.<sup>57</sup> He may have contributed to the group in other ways besides designing specific products, although this seems unlikely since he had not lived in Michigan for seven years.<sup>58</sup> The other official Saarinen-Swanson Group member who, in reality, had little to do with the line was Charles Dusenbury. His inclusion in the group balanced the ratio of male to female members. Moreover, in a presentation on the line, Dusenbury was the only Saarinen-Swanson Group member stated to have made the furnishings himself. As a male and academically trained fine artist, he was not at risk of being confused for an amateur.<sup>59</sup> Since antiquity it was believed that only men could create, whereas women—like craftspeople—could at best copy.<sup>60</sup> In the *Detroit News* article in which Davies presented the Saarinen-Swanson Group as the fulfilment of Cranbrook’s Arts and Crafts goals and called the designers artists, she used male pronouns to refer to artists.<sup>61</sup> To further dissociate the line with femininity and amateurism, the Saarinen-Swanson Group marketing and press seldom used the words “decorate,” “decorating,” and “decorator.” Instead, publicity called the line a “home furnishings package,” a “coordinated collection,” a “co-ordinated line of home furnishings,” “a complete plan for contemporary living,” a “furniture group,” and “a co-ordinated home furnishings group.”<sup>62</sup> Avoiding any form of the word “decorate” helped clarify that the line was created by a collective of intellectual, professionally trained authorities on home furnishings.

Of all the Saarinen-Swanson Group designers, Pipsan had the highest risk of being confused for a “lady decorator.”<sup>63</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, until around 1940 she had identified as an

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<sup>57</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; Davies, “For Use and Beauty”; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 154; “Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge,” 152.

<sup>58</sup> Baldwin, *Autobiography*, 194.

<sup>59</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group.”

<sup>60</sup> See Battersby, *Gender and Genius*.

<sup>61</sup> Davies, “For Use and Beauty.”

<sup>62</sup> “Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group”; Roche, “Room Designers”; Hudson’s training booklet; Sheppard, “For Modern Living”; “Furniture for Moderns Enlists Aid of Fine Art,” *Detroit Free Press*, 24 Aug. 1947; “Saarinen-Swanson and Johnson,” 109.

<sup>63</sup> On lady decorators, see Introduction.

interior decorator, and like many lady decorators she had connections to fashion (she attempted to work as a dressmaker and she adopted a glamorous image). Also like many lady decorators, Pipsan did not hold any degrees.<sup>64</sup> She had only taken individual higher-education classes in Finland; most of her education took place informally in her home.<sup>65</sup> Pipsan did not officially study at the Cranbrook Academy of Art and she may not have taught there either, unlike the other female Saarinen-Swanson Group designers. Strengell was an instructor and department head, and Winston earned a master's degree there. Furthermore, Pipsan's track record for obtaining work resembled the stereotype of a lady decorator: she secured much of her interiors work through her family connections. Pipsan's ties to her husband and father were pointed out in Saarinen-Swanson Group press. *House & Garden* explained that "much of [Pipsan's] work has been in connection with her husband's architecture"; elsewhere she was described as the daughter of the famed architect Eliel Saarinen.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps to compensate for Pipsan's questionable image, the marketing did not associate her with handwork, as it did with the other women. Strengell was described as a "well-known Cranbrook weaver," a "designer and weaver," and a significant figure in the development of "American weaving" whose mass-production designs were based on her hand-loomed samples.<sup>67</sup> And Winston was described as a ceramicist who applied her skills for mass production.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Pipsan's hand skills were not detailed in marketing or press even though she had practical experience in metalworking and textiles—two out of the four furnishing groups for which she designed products in the line. Nor was she pictured doing handcrafts as Strengell and Winston

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<sup>64</sup> Kirkham and Sparke, "A Woman's Place," 307-14.

<sup>65</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>66</sup> "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 156; Hudson's advertisement; Weigle, "Grand Rapids New Furniture Lures Buyers"; Davies, "For Use and Beauty"; "Evening Session"; Sheppard, "For Modern Living."

<sup>67</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty"; "Presentation of the Saarinen-Swanson Design Group"; "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 221.

<sup>68</sup> Davies, "For Use and Beauty"; "Art, Architecture and Decoration Merge," 157.

were. Instead, in a promotional photograph, Pipsan was pictured holding presentation boards of furniture drawings (furniture being associated with men) in front of an array of finished goods, creating a professional and business-like image (fig. 9).

As discussed in chapter 2, in the decade leading up to the release of the Saarinen-Swanson Group, Pipsan endeavoured to legitimize her work in interiors by establishing her own business, using the name Pipsan *Saarinen* Swanson, and identifying as an interior designer. Yet, the very concept of the Saarinen-Swanson Group diminished the role of interior design as a discrete and specialized design activity. Marketing and press glossed over Pipsan's role designing the Johnson showroom. Ostensibly, because the furnishings were designed by a group of like-minded designers, the products were guaranteed to harmonize; because coordination was built into the Saarinen-Swanson Group palette, a professional interior designer was not necessary.

Pipsan, however, did not share this view. She believed interior design was critical to the aesthetic success of an interior furnished with Saarinen-Swanson Group products. She evidenced this belief in comments on Saarinen-Swanson Group interiors that she did *not* design: the model rooms in the J. L. Hudson Company department store in Detroit. Concerning the work of Hudson's in-house interior decorator, Pipsan admitted to her son the furnishings were “pretty badly displayed... not at all glamorous like [illeg.], dark and gloomy [and] not using our colours to best advantage. but anyway a big job! — Hope they will sell!”<sup>69</sup> Pipsan felt that one could go wrong with the Saarinen-Swanson Group palette. However, the goal of the venture was financial success—to sell the products, as well as to allow Pipsan to better execute her own interiors. When Pipsan's interior design style was developed into a mass-produced line of furnishings, her skills at interior design could not be commodified the same way as individual furnishings. Her work had to be distilled into products, since individual products could be produced, marketed, and monetized in a

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<sup>69</sup> Hudson's training booklet, n.p.; Pipsan to Bob Jr., undated [late Nov. 1947]. box 8, folder 13, SP.

way that an interior designers' skills, or the ensembles she created, could not. To convince consumers to buy the products, interior design had to recede into the background of the Saarinen-Swanson Group brand identity.

### Conclusion

As discussed in chapter 5, many of the Saarinen-Swanson Group products were not newly designed, and for the products that were newly designed, comparable furnishings—even if few—were already on the market. Besides new products, there was another way to address consumers' post-war desire for novelty, one that could be implemented no matter the state of materials, production, or labour: marketing. Through the process of associating values with products and communicating these values to the public, marketing could impart new ideas onto designs that were not in themselves novel. The brand identity of the Saarinen-Swanson Group, established in the marketing and further embellished in the press, was rooted in Pipsan's interior design work. Pipsan had established an aesthetic that combined industrial and handcraft elements. Pipsan's aesthetic and the Saarinen-Swanson Group identity as a line of mass-produced furnishings that maintained the quality of expensive handcrafted furnishings situated the products within the emerging Craft Revival. Marketing and press hyped up the advantageous union of handcraft and industry, going so far as to claim that the Saarinen-Swanson Group fulfilled Cranbrook's virtuous Arts and Crafts goals. Publicity conveyed that despite relying on serial manufacture and national distribution, the furnishings line was not a mere consumerist novelty or a trend that encouraged conformity. The message was, rather than being a commercial scheme like those peddled by industrial designers or a frivolous decorating scheme, the Saarinen-Swanson Group provided consumers with a meaningful way of life—one in step with American democracy.



IMAGE REMOVED DUE  
TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. Lydia Winston mixing ceramic glaze,  
Saarinen-Swanson Group press photograph (*Detroit  
News*, 23 Feb. 1947)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE  
TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 2. Marianne Strengell at the loom,  
Saarinen-Swanson Group press photograph (*Detroit  
News*, 23 Feb. 1947)

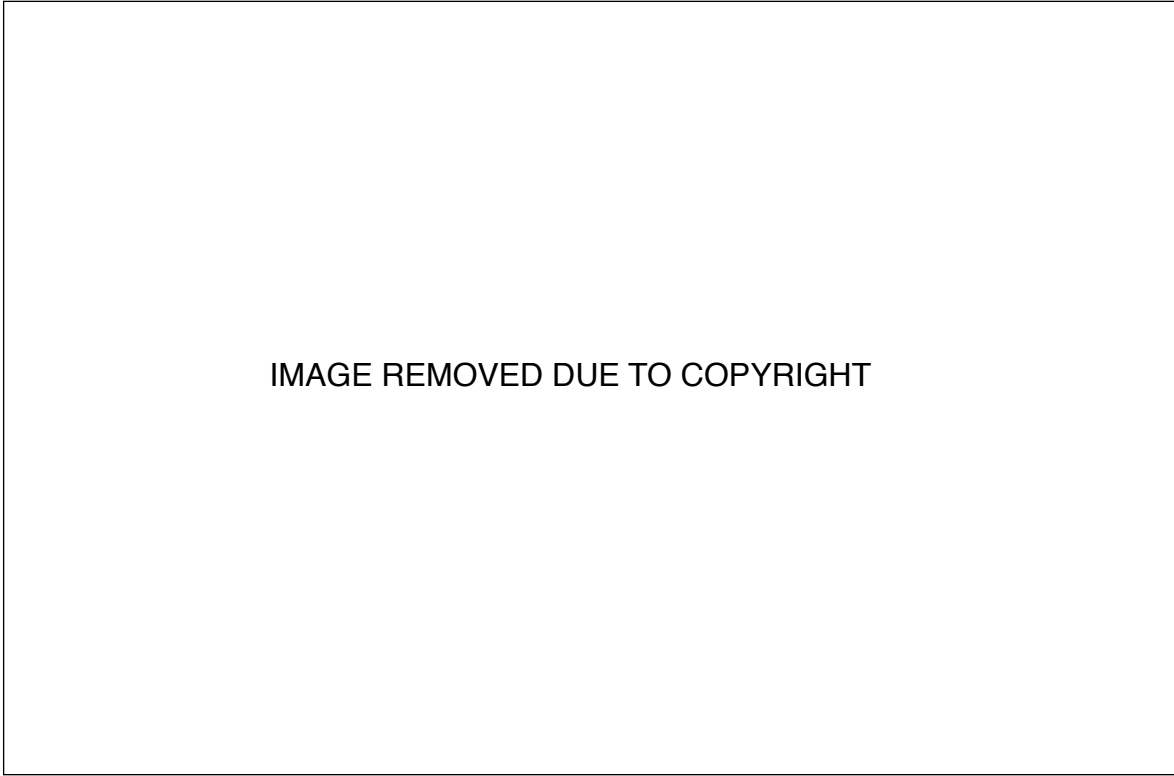


Figure 3. Saarienen-Swanson Group model room, displayed at Cranbrook from 9 Nov. 1948-6 Jan. 1949, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarienen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

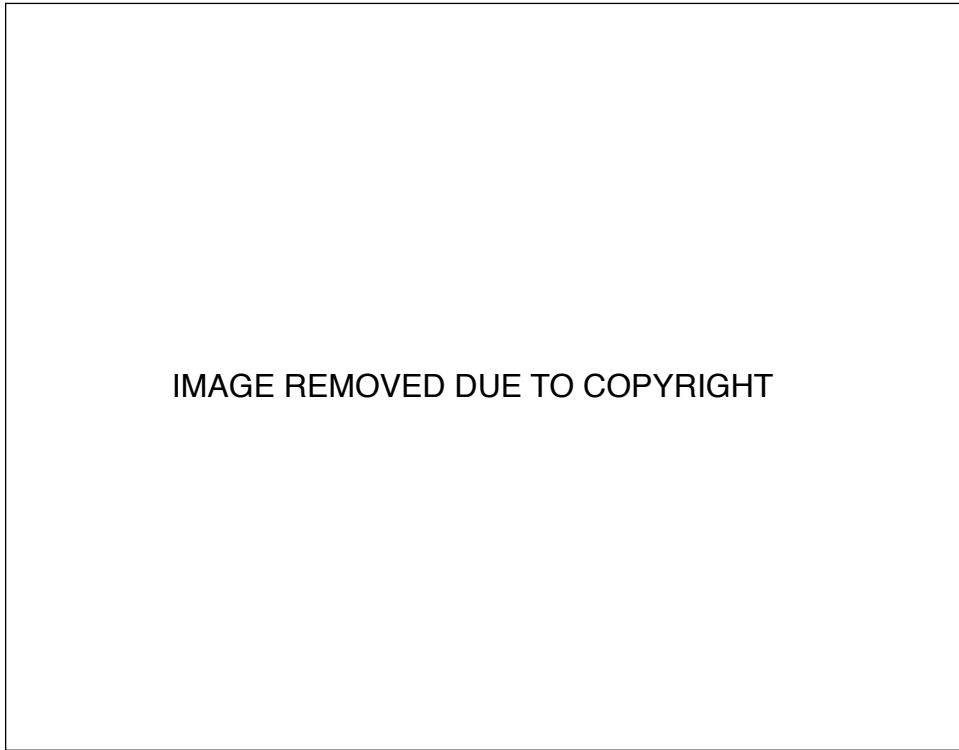


Figure 4. Saarienen-Swanson Group ceramic dinnerware, designed by Lydia Winston, Saarienen-Swanson Group textiles, designed by Marianne Strengell, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarienen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



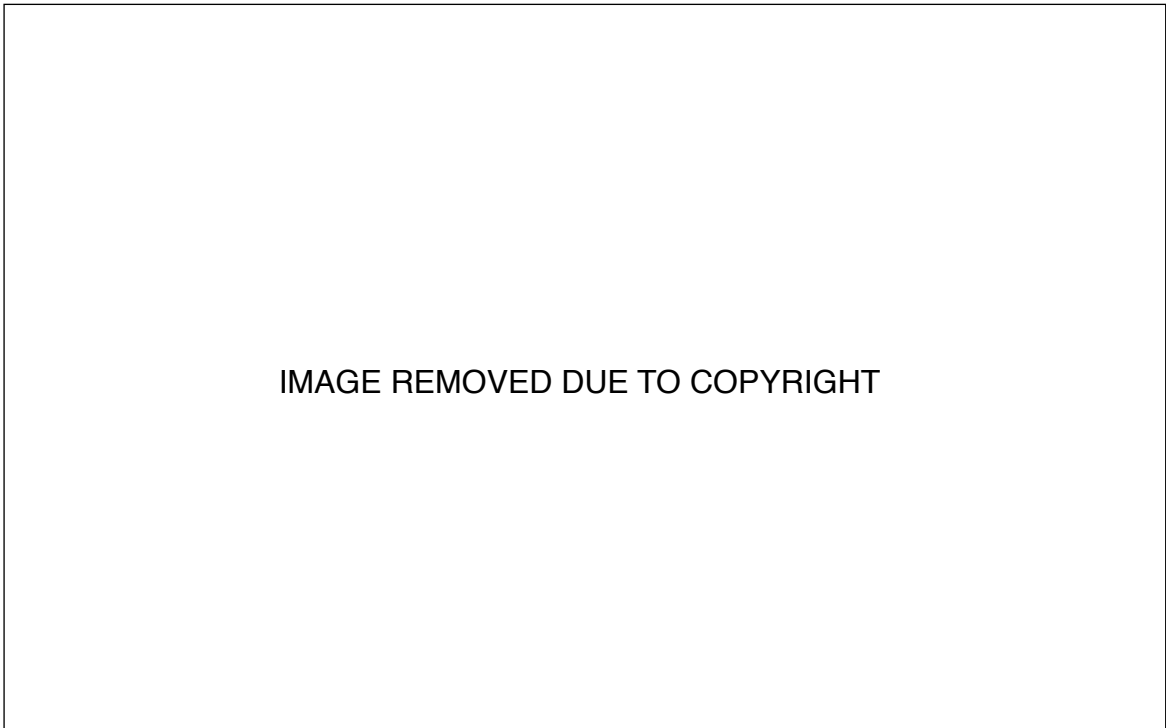


Figure 5. Closeup of Saarinen-Swanson Group printed textile, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (Cooper Hewitt website, 2000-33-1)

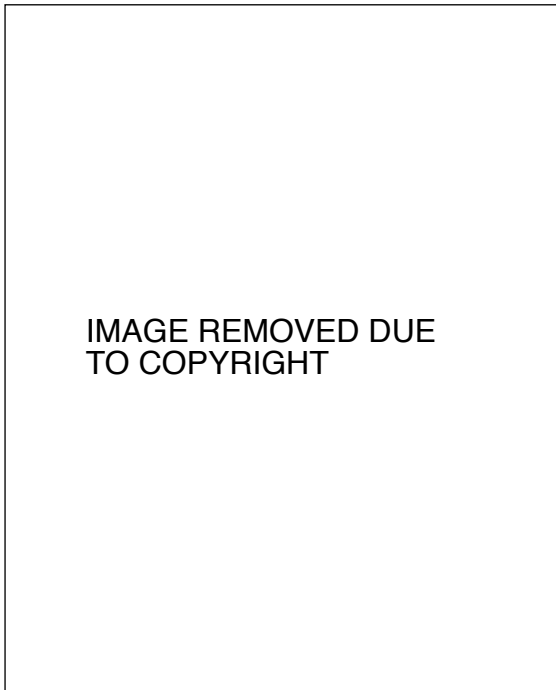


Figure 6. Closeup of Saarinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

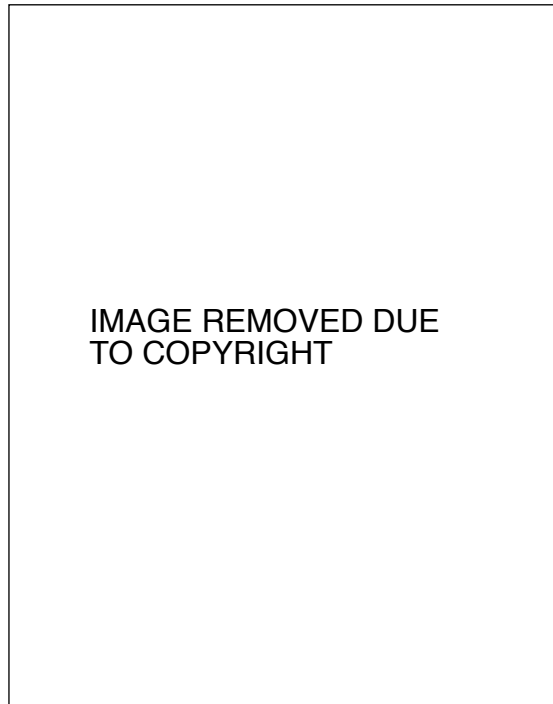


Figure 7. Closeup of Saarinen-Swanson Group lamp, designed by Pipsan, released 1947 (Cranbrook Art Museum, T 2001.51, photograph by the author)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 8. Saarinen-Swanson Group model room, 1947, Johnson Furniture Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan  
(J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



Figure 9. Pipsan and Bob, Saarinen-Swanson Group press photograph (*Detroit News*, 23 Feb. 1947)

**PART IV: Sol-Air (released 1950-1955)**

## Chapter 7: Metal, Slat-Top, and Sling Indoor-Outdoor Furniture

In 1950, Pipsan with Bob and their son Bob Jr. released Sol-Air, a line of indoor-outdoor furniture made of iron rods, wood slat tops, and sling seats. Pipsan's earlier interior design work demonstrated that she had long been interested in comparable seating. But the Swansons had never designed this type of furniture, and getting it produced was a learning process. Once on the market, Sol-Air quickly found critical and commercial success, and the Swansons expanded the line over the next five years. When the line debuted, Pipsan was portrayed as the head designer, but as time went on, her husband and son were increasingly included in publicity. The brand-identity of Sol-Air, established in marketing and elaborated on in the press, aligned the furniture with post-war trends in modern design and American culture.

### From Pipsan's interiors to a line of indoor-outdoor furniture

The furniture that would eventually be called Sol-Air was originally designed for a 1949 modern glass addition to the living room of the Swansons' English revival style home, which Bob had originally designed after their marriage in 1926.<sup>1</sup> Conforming to the Swanson's long-established division of labour, Pipsan took the lead in designing the interior of the addition (fig. 1). When she began working on the new space, she was confronted with the same obstacle she had faced when designing interiors for other peoples' homes in years past: she could not find the furnishings she had in mind on the market. Once again, this dilemma led the Swansons to commission custom furniture, which, in this case, were designed primarily by Pipsan in collaboration with Bob and their son Bob Jr., who had begun working in the family architecture office in 1946 after graduating from high

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<sup>1</sup> "Tower Knoll," *Afterglow* (MI), Dec. 1927, 2-5; Bob's 1949 architectural drawings, A.D. 15.850-857, Cranbrook Archives.

school.<sup>2</sup> The chairs had canvas sling seats lashed to wrought-iron rod bases, and tables and benches had tops of fir-wood slats on wrought-iron frames.

Pleased with the outcome of the new designs, Pipsan and Bob decided to see if there was any commercial interest in them.<sup>3</sup> Ficks Reed Co., an established outdoor furniture company based in Cincinnati, Ohio, agreed to advertise and sell the line if the Swansons were able to get it produced elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Pipsan had previously purchased Ficks Reed furniture for her interiors on at least three occasions, including an order of iron and sling outdoor furniture, discussed below.<sup>5</sup> The Swansons convinced the Aluminum Products Company, located in Pontiac, Michigan, seven miles from Bloomfield Hills, to manufacture the line. Aluminum Products made a thirteen-piece sample group to show at the January 1950 Grand Rapids Winter Furniture Market: an easy chair offered with and without arm rests; a side chair with and without arm rests; a lounge chair; a day bed with foam rubber cushions; two benches; and a table offered in five different sizes (figs. 2-5).<sup>6</sup> The canvas seats were offered in “apple green,” “lemon yellow,” and orange-red “rust.”<sup>7</sup> Ficks Reed and the Swansons agreed to name the line Sol-Air and market it as indoor-outdoor furniture.<sup>8</sup> Buyers responded enthusiastically, placing orders exceeding 3,800 units in the line’s first three months on

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<sup>2</sup> Beatrice Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge,” *Detroit News*, 2 July 1950; Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022; Bob Jr., email to the author, 6 April 2022. Bob Jr. remembers that his family lived with pieces of Sol-Air furniture in their home after the furniture was fabricated. On the issue of credit, see below. It is not known who fabricated the original pieces.

<sup>3</sup> Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge.”

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Ficks, Sr., President, Ficks Reed Co., to Bob, 1 June 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP.

<sup>5</sup> Eden residence photographs, ca. 1940, box 11, folder 3, SP; “Super Set-Ups for Summer,” *House & Garden*, May 1941, 25; Ficks Reed Co. invoice, Neff residence, 1940-1942, box 11, folder 16, SAR; Ficks Reed Co. invoice, 7 Jan. 43, Koebel residence, box 2, folder 10, SP.

<sup>6</sup> Aluminum Products, “Cost Estimates on Outdoor Furniture,” 27 Nov. 1949, box 3, folder 14, SP; Bob to Robert L. Ficks, Sr., President, Ficks Reed Co., 5 Dec. 1949, box 3, folder 14, SP; Bob to Robert L. Ficks, Jr., Sales Manager, Ficks Reed Co., 23 Dec. 1949, box 3, folder 14, SP.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Closson’s advertisement, *Cincinnati Enquirer* (OH), 30 April 1950; Dodge advertisement, *Tennessee Sun*, 18 June 1950; Edith B. Crumb, “Grand Rapids Market Displays New and Old in Furniture,” *Detroit News*, 16 Jan. 1950; “In the Showrooms: Summer Furniture,” *Interiors* 109, no. 8 (March 1950): 132.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Ficks, Jr., Sales Manager, Ficks Reed Co., to Bob, 24 Feb. 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP; Robert L. Ficks, Sr., President, Ficks Reed Co., to Bob, 7 March 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP.

the market.<sup>9</sup> Sol-Air retailed across the country in major department stores, including R. H. Macy & Co. and W. & J. Sloane in New York and Cannell & Chaffin in Los Angeles.<sup>10</sup>

In Pipsan's interior design work executed prior to Sol-Air, there are no clear precedents for the slat-top benches and tables. She had, however, established a preference for a furnishings palette that comprised a large amount of handcraft-looking natural woodgrain with accents of industrial-looking matte-finish metals, as demonstrated in chapters 3 and 5. Sol-Air seating furniture, on the other hand, did have an obvious precedent. On the terrace and lawn of the Eden residence, completed in 1940, Pipsan used comparable lounge, side, and dining chairs—these had been designed and distributed by Ficks Reed (figs. 6-7). Compared to Sol-Air, the earlier Ficks Reed seats had similar slings lashed to dark, matte curving metal frames.<sup>11</sup> The Sol-Air sling seats were more seamless and lighter-looking than the earlier Ficks Reed ones, which were slightly padded and visually broken up with horizontal lines of stitching. Sol-Air seats had bases made of slight-looking wrought iron rod instead of the bulkier tubular iron of the earlier designs. The bases of Sol-Air were also simpler, made with fewer pieces, resulting in a more free-flowing and unified form than those Pipsan previously used outside the Eden home. She may have used the older Ficks Reed furniture as a starting point when designing Sol-Air.

For Pipsan and her co-designers, there was a learning curve in designing their own versions of iron rod and canvas sling indoor-outdoor furniture. The structure and material usage of Sol-Air furniture departed dramatically from the Swansons' previous work. The Grand Rapids manufacturers who produced their earlier furniture lines specialized in traditional cabinetmaking techniques and

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<sup>9</sup> Putnam, "Drawing Board to Forge"; Robert L. Ficks, Jr., Sales Manager, Ficks Reed Co., to Pipsan, 3 March 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP; Ficks Reed Co. Secretary-Treasurer to Glenn Berry, 3 March 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP.

<sup>10</sup> *Good Design* exhibition checklist (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), n.p. MoMA Press Archives, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history/>; Betty Pepis, "Elegance Marks Patio Furniture," *New York Times*, 19 May 1953; Cannell & Chaffin advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 July 1953.

<sup>11</sup> Ficks Reed Co. advertisement, *Interiors* 100, no. 8 (March 1941): 63; "Super Set-Ups for Summer," *House & Garden*, May 1941, 25.

materials. The case furniture in Flexible Home Arrangements and the Saarinen-Swanson Group had wooden carcasses and veneers, and the seating furniture had traditional wooden frames and upholstery. Metal was used only as decorative accents, whereas with Sol-Air furniture, metal was the main structural material used for the frames of the seats and tables. Instead of traditional upholstery, the Sol-Air seats were made of canvas slings or foam rubber cushions.

Sol-Air was also a new experience for the factory that produced it; Aluminum Products had never before fabricated furniture—they were specialists in aluminium garage doors.<sup>12</sup> The factory president explained, “I don’t know a thing about the furniture business... and only got into it after Mrs. Swanson approached me and said a Cincinnati wholesaler [Ficks Reed] would sell her chairs if somebody would make them. So I set up shop and went to work.”<sup>13</sup>

Early in production, Pipsan made frequent trips to the factory to check on the progress and problem solve.<sup>14</sup> The first obstacle was getting the bases made. Aluminum Products had to hire a master blacksmith, who Pipsan may have found, to train their factory workers to shape and weld iron using templates in an ad-hoc production area set up in the factory yard.<sup>15</sup>

Sling seating presented other challenges. Although the fabric on early samples was strong enough to support a body, when the chairs went into production and were put under a stress test, the slings ripped at the stitch lines. At first, the Swansons surmised that the particular dye that was used in production had weakened the fibres. Eventually, they discovered that the factory had changed the direction of the fabric ninety degrees, and this seemingly minor change was the culprit. With textiles, one direction is usually stronger than the other—typically the warp is stronger because

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<sup>12</sup> Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge”; “Factory Needed to Provide Jobs,” *Pontiac Daily News* (MI), 30 May 1950.

<sup>13</sup> “Factory Needed to Provide Jobs.”

<sup>14</sup> Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge.”

<sup>15</sup> Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge”; Production grew so large that by May 1950, four months after the furniture debuted, Aluminum Products sought a new factory building to devote specifically to Sol-Air manufacturing. “Factory Needed to Provide Jobs.”



it has stronger threads. The particular duck fabric used for the Sol-Air slings had 1.66 times more warp threads than weft threads per inch; a higher warp to weft ratio further increased the warp strength relative to the weft. When the Sol-Air chairs went into production, the slings were cut out so that the weaker direction stretched across the width of the chair—the direction that experienced greater strain when someone sat on it. The problem was resolved by changing the layout of the slings on the yardage back to the original direction, and, as an added measure, the factory increased the stitch length (a short stitch length can make the stitch line weak). After these tweaks, Bob reassured Ficks Reed that “we are now able to jump up and down on them without [them] collapsing. We learn new things every day.”<sup>16</sup>

Certain furniture forms also required tweaking to get it just right in the Swansons’ minds. For the design of the lounge chair, they refined the form over time. Bob Jr. explained that he and his parents deemed the first version too flat, so a revised version was made with less of a recline.<sup>17</sup>

Even the wood in the furniture presented a glitch. The first samples were given a single coat of shellac, which did not prove to be sufficient for extended outdoor use. Therefore, when put into production, wood pieces intended for deliveries to coastal locations were given an extra coat of shellac to better withstand the salt-water air.<sup>18</sup> Such considerations had not been necessary when the Swansons were designing wood furniture for indoor use only.

On the collaboration between the Swansons and Aluminum Products, Pipsan was quoted as saying that “co-operation was wonderful.... Everybody had ideas—good ideas. Then everyone pitched in and worked. That’s why we were able to fill our orders.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bob to Robert L. Ficks, Sr., President, Ficks Reed Co., 10 March 1950, box 3, folder 14, SP.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Jr., interview by the author, 26 Sept. 2019 and 22 Feb. 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Bob to Ficks, Sr, 10 March 1950.

<sup>19</sup> Pipsan quoted in Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge.”

After the debut and initial success of Sol-Air in early 1950, Ficks Reed continued to sell the original products as well as new pieces designed by the Swansons over the next five years. In June 1950, the company showed three new cushioned seating pieces at the Grand Rapids Summer Furniture Market: an easy chair with and without arms and a love seat (fig. 8). In subsequent years, the Swansons added more Sol-Air products, some made from the original iron rod and canvas, others incorporating rattan and glass (figs. 9-10). By 1952, the line comprised forty-six products, expanding to seventy-five products by late 1955. Over the first five years of production, sales numbers exceeded 30,000 units.<sup>20</sup>

The products from the January 1950 release garnered the most attention in the press. Out of all of Pipsan's mass-production work, Sol-Air by far received the most amount of publicity, marking a high point in her career as a furnishings designer. From 1950 to 1955, pieces from the line were pictured in over seventy articles in general-audience and specialist magazines, including *Life*, *Vogue*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *House & Garden*, *Living for Young Homemakers*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Interiors*, and *Architectural Forum*. A coffee table, lounge chair, and side chairs were shown at the *Good Design* exhibition in June 1950 at the Chicago Merchandise Mart, organized in collaboration with MoMA.<sup>21</sup> The Merchandise Mart surveyed buyers on their favourite pieces in the show, and the Sol-Air lounge chair was voted number two.<sup>22</sup> The lounge chair was then included in the first *Good Design* exhibition at MoMA, from November 1950 to January 1951 (fig. 11). A Sol-Air table and benches appeared outside a model home designed by Gregory Ain for the 1950 *Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House*, also held at MoMA (fig. 12). The same year also saw Sol-Air seating and tables featured in a photoshoot outside a Case Study House designed by Raphael

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<sup>20</sup> Sol-Air sales records, box 3, folder 14, SP.

<sup>21</sup> "Judgment in Chicago-II," *Interiors* 110, no. 1 (Aug. 1950): 160.

<sup>22</sup> "News from *Good Design*," 6 Oct. 1950, 3, MoMA Press Archives, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history/>.

Soriano in California (fig. 13). Additionally, pieces were pictured in two of George Nelson's books, *Living Spaces* (1952) and *Chairs* (1953), as well as in Katherine Morrow Ford's *The American House Today* (1951).<sup>23</sup> Ford, Nelson, and MoMA were influential proponents of modern design in the post-war years, and they all considered Sol-Air pieces to be among the best designs on the market. The reception of this line was certainly impressive, especially for a small architecture office in Michigan whose furniture was produced by a local garage-door manufacturer.

### Shifting credit

According to Bob Jr., Pipsan was “the key designer” of Sol-Air. He explained that the line was “kind of a group effort,” but that Pipsan “did most of the designing and [Bob Sr.] would come in and check it out... he was remotely involved.” Bob Jr. worked on the line during summers home from college, where he was studying architecture, by executing drawings for many of the products and designing some pieces himself.<sup>24</sup>

When Sol-Air was first released, the press solely credited Pipsan as its designer. Both the MoMA *Good Design* and *Woman's Home Companion* exhibitions of 1950 and most of the newspaper and magazine articles from that year credited the designs to Pipsan alone.<sup>25</sup> In a *Detroit News* article on the line, the journalist referred to Sol-Air as “her new” furniture, and the only person pictured in

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<sup>23</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Jr., interviews by author, 26 Sept. 2019 and 22 Feb. 2022. Bob Jr. takes credit for designing the Sol-Air lounge, both the 1950 canvas and 1952 rattan versions. Understandably, Bob Jr. could not recall many details about the line, including what kind of direction Pipsan gave him, or who conceived of the general concept of the lounge chair. Bob Jr. explained that his work with his mother and father was collaborative, and it was often hard to distinguish who should get credit for what.

<sup>25</sup> *Good Design* exhibition checklist, n.p.; *The Museum of Modern Art — Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), n.p.; Crumb, “Grand Rapids Market”; Elizabeth Hillyer, “Designing Woman,” *St. Louis Star*, 6 Feb. 1950; “In the Showrooms: Summer Furniture,” 132; Margaret Warren Foote, “Lightweight Lawn Furniture Shows Contemporary Trends: Many Materials Combine Styling Eliminates Fuss,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 April 1950; “Furniture Offers Big Outdoor Choice,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1950; Betty Pepis, “For Terraces Inside and Out,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1950; “A Portfolio of Contemporary Furniture,” *Arts and Architecture* 67, no. 5 (May 1950): 32; “Furniture That Can Stay Out,” *House Beautiful*, May 1950, 165; Putnam, “Drawing Board to Forge”; “Judgment in Chicago—II,” 160.

the newspaper was Pipsan, photographed drawing furniture (fig. 14).<sup>26</sup> An article in the *Pontiac Daily News* elaborated on Pipsan's role in the design process, relaying that she not only designed the furniture, but also convinced the owner of Aluminum Products to take on production of the line, and that thereafter she acted as liaison between the factory and the Swansons' design office.<sup>27</sup> She also appeared alone at the J. L. Hudson Company department store in Detroit to show the furniture to shoppers.<sup>28</sup>

Pipsan, however, was quick to point out that the line was a result of more than her own work. Sometimes she credited Sol-Air to herself and her son, and other times she credited the line to herself, her son, and her husband.<sup>29</sup> After telling the *Detroit News* that she sketched the designs, Pipsan was quoted using the plural "we" to describe the fabrication of the furniture, clarifying that after she found a factory willing to produce the furniture, sample pieces "were made up by her son, 'young Bob' Swanson under her direction."<sup>30</sup> In the *Pontiac Daily News* article that stated Pipsan was the designer, she again made it known that the line was the work of more than just herself, going so far as to proclaim that Sol-Air was "the work of my husband and my son," while admitting that she "had something to do with designing [the furniture]."<sup>31</sup> Pipsan amplified the extent of Bob and Bob Jr.'s involvement and spoke of her own role in a self-effacing manner.

Possibly because Pipsan was portrayed as the sole designer in early press, in which Bob was either not mentioned or presented as having an auxiliary role, she attempted to share the public exposure in other ways. In demonstration rooms she designed that were photographed and used to

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<sup>26</sup> Putnam, "Drawing Board to Forge."

<sup>27</sup> "Factory Needed to Provide Jobs."

<sup>28</sup> "In the Shops," *Detroit News*, 15 June 1950.

<sup>29</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1951], box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan curriculum vitae, undated [ca. 1971], box 9, folder 5, SP; Pipsan, "Look Homeward, America" project statement, 1955, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>30</sup> Putnam, "Drawing Board to Forge." The furniture being "made up" by Bob Jr. probably means that he oversaw the fabrication.

<sup>31</sup> "Factory Needed to Provide Jobs."

publicize Sol-Air, she repeatedly included one of Bob's few independently designed mass-produced furnishings, the candelabrum he designed in 1935—the same one included in the Saarinen-Swanson Group in 1947 (figs. 15-16). Perhaps by featuring Bob's design with the successful furniture line widely credited to her alone, Pipsan was attempting to mitigate the attention she was receiving. Maybe using the publicity as a platform to showcase Bob's work helped her reconcile her individual success with any social pressure she felt not to eclipse her husband.

After the initial burst of publicity on Sol-Air, Bob and Bob Jr. were brought more into the spotlight. In a July 1950 feature article on Sol-Air in *House & Garden*, Pipsan was not credited as the designer, nor even mentioned. Instead, the furniture was credited to Swanson Associates, the name of the architecture office Pipsan and Bob formed after they severed ties with the Saarinens in 1947. Further distancing Pipsan from the work, the article implied that architects designed the furniture: "Architects have long known that one of the best ways to keep you cool is to encourage the surrounding air to move. The Swanson Associates applied the same principle when they designed this outdoor-indoor furniture for Ficks Reed."<sup>32</sup> The article presaged a general shift in credit that followed. Press continued to cover Sol-Air for the next few years as the line developed, and when a designer was credited, it was most often as Swanson Associates. Between 1951 and 1956, Sol-Air was pictured and credited as a Swanson Associates design ten times in magazines, newspapers, and a George Nelson book, while only once during this time did Pipsan receive sole credit.<sup>33</sup>

Like single-name credits, collective credits like "Swanson Associates" disguised the varying degrees of responsibility of what were often complex research, design, and development processes.

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<sup>32</sup> "Air Minded," *House & Garden*, July 1950, 72-73.

<sup>33</sup> "Lots are Circular in this 50-House Group," *House & Garden*, Feb. 1951, 111; "Furniture Primer: Price is the Point," *House & Garden*, May 1951, 187; Anne Douglas, "New Home Furnishings Simplify Color Planning and of Coordination," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 June 1952; "Ideas for Summer Living," *House & Garden*, June 1952, 70; "Market Report: On Furniture," *Interiors* 112, no. 2 (Sept. 1952): 103; "Our New Kind of Living Calls for Indoor-Outdoor Furniture," *House Beautiful*, Oct. 1952, 317; "Summer Furniture, '52 Crop," *Interiors* 112, no. (Dec. 1952): 126; "P/A Interior Design Products," *Progressive Architecture* 34, no. 4 (April 1953): 133; Betty Pepis, "Elegance Marks Patio Furniture," *New York Times*, 19 May 1953; Nelson, *Chairs*, 134; "The Year's Work," *Interiors* 111, no. 1 (Aug. 1951): 81.

In this instance, by crediting the name of the architecture office, Pipsan's role was diminished since she was not an architect. It is not known who suggested the Swanson Associates credit line, but the shift in credit was probably either specified or approved by her and/or Bob. It is unlikely that the press would initiate a change in a credit line from an individual designer who had recently won awards for her independent work and had an illustrious family name to the business name of a relatively unknown architecture office. In terms of public visibility, the new credit line pushed Pipsan out of the limelight, skewing the credit in favour of the architects in Swanson Associates—her husband and son.

One explanation for the change in credit is that neither Pipsan nor Bob anticipated how valuable the credit line would be. The way Pipsan spoke about Sol-Air (albeit according to a single news article), made it sound like the furniture was initially meant to be for their own home and they showed it to buyers on a whim, to test the waters and see if there was any market interest in it.<sup>34</sup> The Swansons may not have put much thought into the credit line at first, and they simply credited it accurately—with Pipsan as the main designer. Pipsan conveyed that they were surprised by the enthusiastic response to the furniture.<sup>35</sup> Once the line started getting so much attention, the Swansons may have reconsidered the credit line and agreed that publicizing their family architecture office should take precedence over Pipsan's independent reputation. Bob and Bob Jr. may have also become more involved in the line as it developed, and a joint credit line may have seemed like a more accurate reflection of the line by the middle of 1950.

Promoting the Swanson family business might have also been related to the delicate position Pipsan and Bob found themselves in 1950, just a few years after they split with the Saarinens. At the time Sol-Air was released, Pipsan expressed resentment towards the shadow cast by the Saarinen

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<sup>34</sup> Putnam, "Drawing Board to Forge."

<sup>35</sup> Putnam.

name onto her family's work. One journalist reported, "Mrs. Swanson was firm in saying her famous designer father, Eliel Saarinen, had nothing to do with designing the new [Sol-Air] chairs." Pipsan clarified that she, her husband, and her son were not only responsible for the line, but were also good designers, adding, "The truth is we think we're pretty good too."<sup>36</sup> Pipsan appeared to bristle at the mention of her renowned father in relation to her family's current work. She wanted it to be clear that Sol-Air, the first mass-production project she and her family completed after the 1947 split, was not a Saarinen project. The success of Sol-Air, credited to Swanson Associates, might help establish a reputation and build recognition for the Swanson's new architecture office in its own right.

The Saarinen shadow continued to linger over the Swansons for many years, and Pipsan continued to express resentment at the association. In 1975, when Bob's mid-1930s candelabrum was offered for sale by a Detroit auction house, the sale catalogue erroneously credited Eliel as the designer. Pipsan wrote to the auctioneers to correct the misattribution:

As I am the Saarinen daughter, I feel I have to set the record straight. The candelabra [*sic*] was designed by J. Robert F. Swanson (my husband) in the early thirties for the Mendelson [*sic*] residence in Bloomfield Hills. Mr. Swanson was in no way connected with Eliel Saarinen at the time.... I know it is too late to do anything about the credit as the literature is already printed, but we would appreciate if it was brought up during the auction! Having a famous family is not always on the plus side as we are so often not given credit for our designs. Mr. Swanson is a very fine Designer [*sic*] and Architect [*sic*] in his own right.<sup>37</sup>

Pipsan demonstrated how important it was to her that Bob be credited his due. She came to feel that her maiden name distracted from the merits of her and her husband's work.

In the years following the release of Sol-Air, Pipsan continued to use her platform to promote the family business as well as Bob and Bob Jr. individually. In 1955, *Life* magazine invited Pipsan, along with four other "distinguished members of the American Institute of Decorators," to

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<sup>36</sup> "Factory Needed to Provide Jobs."

<sup>37</sup> Pipsan to Mr. Stalker, Stalker & Boos auction house, 23 July 1975, box 1, folder 17, SP.

design interiors of partial model homes, which were then published in the magazine and displayed at the Chicago Merchandise Mart for six months.<sup>38</sup> The project, promoted by the Merchandise Mart as its “largest home furnishings exhibition” to date, focused on interior design, and Pipsan was the only person in her family partnership to ever identify as an interior designer or decorator.<sup>39</sup> (The magazine used both “decorator” and “designer” to refer to the individuals responsible for the model homes without distinguishing between the terms.) Yet, in Pipsan’s project statement submitted to *Life*, she meticulously detailed the contributions of the Swanson Associates office as well as Bob and Bob Jr. to her model home design. She specified that the “house was designed by our office [Swanson Associates], with the interiors and color by me. The Sol-Air furniture I did together with my son, Robert S. Swanson. The leather and metal chair, candelabra [*sic*], and fireplace tools were designed by my husband, J. Robert F. Swanson.”<sup>40</sup> In this rare opportunity for Pipsan to be nationally recognized for her interior design work, in one of America’s most popular magazines no less, she still tried to share the publicity with her husband and son.<sup>41</sup> Pipsan had originally gotten into interior design work in the late 1920s to help Bob; twenty-five years later, she still utilized her interior design work to assist Bob, as well as her aspiring architect-designer son.

As discussed above, according to the Swansons’ arrangement with Ficks Reed, Ficks Reed was responsible for selling and advertising Sol-Air. Although “Swanson Associates” was sometimes credited in magazine and newspaper articles that pictured Sol-Air, most Ficks Reed marketing material for the line did not credit a designer. Ficks Reed published five different advertisements that promoted Sol-Air in *Interiors*, and in 1954, the company produced a four-page trade catalogue on the

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<sup>38</sup> “Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes,” *Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 114-21. See chapter 8 for an in-depth discussion of this project.

<sup>39</sup> “Shades of Americana from Five Members of the A.I.D.,” *Interiors* 114, no. 7 (Feb. 1955): 86.

<sup>40</sup> Pipsan, “Look Homeward, America.”

<sup>41</sup> In 1948, the circulation of *Life* magazine was 5.45 million. According to the magazine’s own market research, in 1954 60% of Americans over the age of ten viewed at least one copy of *Life* in a thirteen-week period. Baughman, “Who Read *Life*?” 42, 44.



line.<sup>42</sup> Ficks Reed also provided retailers across the country with an advertisement template with a blank spot for the store to paste in their name and then run in local newspapers.<sup>43</sup> Of these marketing materials, only one of the advertisements credited a designer: it credited Swanson Associates, in small type, inconspicuously placed in the composition (fig. 17). In contrast to Ficks Reeds' minimization of Swanson Associates in advertisements, the company more heavily promoted the name of another designer whose lines they sold at the same time—the well-known designer Paul Frankl. In one advertisement, Frankl's name was prominently placed in bold type next to a headshot of Frankl, who was described as “dean of modern furniture designers” (fig. 18). In another advertisement that promoted Frankl's line along with Sol-Air and a third line, Paul Frankl's name was included, whereas a designer name for Sol-Air and the other line was not.<sup>44</sup> By including Frankl's name in advertisements, the company sought to add value to the furniture line and encourage customers to buy it. Evidently, Ficks Reed did not believe highlighting “Swanson Associates” in a similar manner would have the same effect.

### The Sol-Air brand identity

Reflecting certain trends in modern design, Sol-Air furniture possessed forms and lines inspired by the Aaltos' work as well as fine art, biology, and modern developments in science and technology.<sup>45</sup> The planar seats, with single-direction curves, especially resembled Alvar Aalto's Paimio chair from the early 1930s.<sup>46</sup> The amoeboid shapes that Sol-Air slings took on and the abstract lines of the bases mimicked forms in paintings and sculptures by artists like Joan Miro, Paul Klee, Jean Arp, and

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<sup>42</sup> Ficks Reed Co. advertisements in *Interiors* 109, no. 11 (June 1950): 50; 110, no. 6 (Jan. 1951): 30; 111, no. 6 (Jan. 1952): 45; 111, no. 11 (June 1952): 171; and 111, no. 12 (July 1952): 113; Ficks Reed Co. Sol-Air catalogue, undated [1954], collection of the author.

<sup>43</sup> For example, see Closson's advertisement, *Cincinnati Enquirer* (OH); Robb & Stucky Co. advertisement, *News-Press* (Fort Myers, FL), 25 June 1950; and Oulla's advertisement, *Florence Morning News* (SC), 12 June 1954.

<sup>44</sup> Ficks Reed Co. advertisement, *Interiors* 111, no. 6 (Jan. 1952): 45.

<sup>45</sup> See Kevin L. Stayton, “Introduction,” in *Vital Forms*, 22-35.

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 4 (figure 18).

Alexander Calder. Sol-Air's skeletal frames also looked like x-rays, and the U- and V-lines mimicked the shapes of a boomerang and parabola, two ubiquitous post-war symbols that represented flight, dynamism, and technological progress.<sup>47</sup> The wiry legs that terminated in small discs recalled popular representations of molecular structure and space imagery.<sup>48</sup> The lacing that attached the sling seats to the bases and the lacing on the back of the cushioned chairs created squiggly, zig-zag lines reminiscent of popular science illustrations of sunlight, radio, and television waves as well as the distinctive metal coil on the first transistor, invented in by Bell Labs 1947.<sup>49</sup> At the time, prominent designers acknowledged the technological and fine-art sources of the such modern furniture vocabulary.<sup>50</sup>

The Swanson's new furniture evidenced other trends in modern design. Benches and tables with medium-brown wood slat tops with dark metal legs were a common type by the 1950s.<sup>51</sup> V-shaped wrought iron "hairpin legs" were extremely popular, seen in products sold by high-end manufacturers such as Knoll Associates, Inc. as well as mass-market retailers like Sears, Roebuck and Co.<sup>52</sup> Sling seating on iron rod bases was another recurring type, the most popular design of which being the B.K.F. chair.<sup>53</sup> The lacing on Sol-Air seating that attached the canvas to a rigid metal base represented yet another trend in seating furniture, with lounge chairs of this style being

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<sup>47</sup> See Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 113-17.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see the cover of *Popular Science* from May 1949 and the cover of *Fortune* from June 1942. See also molecular model kits, such as the one in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, accession number 1994.0019.

<sup>49</sup> See *Popular Science*, June 1946, 71; *Popular Science*, July 1950, 109, 186; Jack Gould, *All About Radio and Television* (New York: Random House, 1953), cover.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see George Nelson, "Modern Furniture," *Interiors* 108, no. 12 (July 1949): 77-117; and George Nelson, "Notes on the New Subscape," *Interiors* 110, no. 4 (Nov. 1950): 140-43.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Harry Weese and Ben Baldwin had designed comparable tables and benches in 1940. Eliot Noyes, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 36.

<sup>52</sup> *Chairs* (New York: Knoll Associates, 1950), 25; *Sears Christmas Book* (Seattle: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1956), 426, 434.

<sup>53</sup> See Jane Blake and Jane Thompson, "More Than You May Want to Know About a Very Significant Chair," *Architecture Plus* 1, no. 4 (May 1973): 73-80. The B.K.F. chair was designed in the late 1930s and first sold in the United States as of the early 1940s.

particularly popular.<sup>54</sup>

Even before modern design started to gain a significant foothold in the furniture industry in the late 1940s, modern outdoor and porch furniture was reported to have been the most popular type of modern furniture.<sup>55</sup> Post-war developments boosted demand for outdoor as well as indoor-outdoor furniture. More middle-class white Americans than ever able to own their own homes in the newly emerging suburbs.<sup>56</sup> In many modern- and traditional-style homes, open-plan layouts broke down the physical boundaries between rooms, glass curtain walls and large picture windows diminished the barriers between inside and outside, and outdoor spaces such as terraces and patios extended the living areas into nature. The back patio became a focal point of the post-war house as a place to relax, congregate, and informally entertain. Having one's own private outdoor space—one of the main draws of the suburbs—was a defining feature of the “American Dream.”<sup>57</sup> With space broken down within the house and between the inside and outside, no longer was it as common to buy specific pieces of furniture for specific rooms. Furniture like Sol-Air that could be used in many different spaces either inside and/or outside the house suited a common vision of the modern post-war home and lifestyle.

To increase the appeal of Sol-Air to national audiences, marketing further aligned the furniture with popular notions of modern life. For one, the name of the line (which, as discussed, the Swansons were involved in selecting) looked and sounded like the French word for sun, *soleil*, and the hyphenation in the product name isolated *sol*, the word for sun in Spanish and Portuguese.

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<sup>54</sup> For example, see “Waikiki” lounge chair advertisement, *House Beautiful*, April 1952, 63. See also Laura Tanner, “Outdoor Furniture that Outwits the Weather,” *House Beautiful*, April 1952, 148; Laura Tanner, “A New Species of Furnishing is Appearing: Indoor-Outdoor Furniture,” *House Beautiful*, April 1953, 155.

<sup>55</sup> “Current Furniture Styles,” *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 86, no. 5 (15 May 1931): 138; “Furniture Style Forecast,” *Upholsterer and Interior Decorator* 93, no. 6 (Dec. 1934-Jan. 1935): 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 124.

<sup>57</sup> Sandy Isenstadt, *The Modern American House: Spaciousness and Middle-Class Identity, Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 253-54; Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 124.

The post-war period saw a dramatic increase in vacations to Latin American destinations, southern California (where Spanish was the second most popular language spoken), and France. The spike in leisure travel was thanks to a confluence of factors: the rise of air transportation, the newfound prosperity of many middle-class Americans, and an increase in instalment buying to pay for purchases including vacations.<sup>58</sup> The name of Sol-Air played up an association with warm-weather months, when most Americans took their vacations, and faraway destinations, where one might bask in the sun, take in the fresh air, and spend time outdoors.<sup>59</sup> In newspaper advertisements and reports (probably written based on a Ficks Reed press release), the colours of canvas seating were called “apple green” and “lemon yellow,” names that brought fresh produce to mind.<sup>60</sup> Marketing used other words associated with warm-weather destinations, like “casual,” “colorful,” and “comfortable.”<sup>61</sup> A full-page Sol-Air advertisement stressed the airiness of the furniture by depicting the chairs as line drawings, so dematerialized and light that they floated up the page (fig. 17). Although increasing numbers of Americans were boarding airplanes to take vacations in faraway lands, air travel was still a luxury mode of transportation that only offered first-class service at the time Sol-Air was released.<sup>62</sup> If a consumer could not afford to visit France, Latin America, or Southern California, perhaps they could manage to buy a new piece or two of furniture for their home. Sol-Air marketing conveyed that the furniture brought a bit of vacation living to the home,

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<sup>58</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Survey of International Travel* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 9, 12-13, 16, 17; Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 121, Table A.1; Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 128-31.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Survey of International Travel*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Closson's advertisement; Robb & Stucky Co. advertisement; Oulla's advertisement; Adelaide Handy, “1950 Home Filled With Latest Gadgets,” *Miami Herald*, 8 Jan. 1950; “Combine Wood, Metal, Fabric,” *News-Herald* (Franklin, PA), 14 Sept. 1950; Margaret Warren Foote, “Lightweight Lawn Furniture Shows Contemporary Trends: Many Materials Combine Styling Eliminates Fuss,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 April 1950; “Furniture Offers Big Outdoor Choice,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1950; Untitled, *Vermont Sunday News* (St. Albans), 11 Nov. 1951; Crumb, “Grand Rapids Market”; Hillyer, “Designing Woman”; “In the Showrooms: Summer Furniture,” 132.

<sup>61</sup> Closson's advertisement; Robb & Stucky Co. advertisement; “In the Showrooms: Summer Furniture,” 132; “Easy Dress-Ups for Outdoor Meals,” *Better Homes & Gardens*, July 1950, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 47, 125, 128; Kenneth Hudson and Julian Pettifer, *Diamonds in the Sky: A Social History of Air Travel* (London: Bodley Head, 1979), 121-52.

lending momentary respite from everyday bustle. Unlike a vacation, Sol-Air was an expenditure that could be enjoyed year round.

Such improvements to daily life were often attributed to the marvels of modern technology. The name Sol-Air also sounded like an exotic pronunciation of the word “solar,” thereby associating the furniture with recent advances in solar science. In the 1940s and early 1950s, such developments were reported in mass publications and drew attention from design circles because of the possibility of using solar energy to heat homes.<sup>63</sup> This and other innovative methods to control temperature in the home promised that modern architectural elements like glass curtain walls could be enjoyed all over the country, not just in warm climates. Although Sol-Air furniture had in reality nothing to do with solar science, but was rather fabricated by novice blacksmiths in a factory yard, the name imparted the products with scientific and high-tech overtones.

Other words used to describe Sol-Air furniture in press articles and advertisements referenced other recent developments. The paint colour on the iron bases was called “gunmetal” and the fabric of the slings were made of “army duck.”<sup>64</sup> Army duck and other types of cotton duck fabric had been high-priority materials during the war, used to make military tents.<sup>65</sup> The restrictions on “army duck” were reported in mass media.<sup>66</sup> After the war ended and restrictions lifted, many wartime material developments, such as plywood moulded into compound curves, were used in

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<sup>63</sup> For example, see George Nelson and Henry Nicolls Wright, chapter 15, “Solar Heating” in *Tomorrow’s House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945). The book was a *New York Times* bestseller and within four months of release was in its fourth printing. Abercrombie, *George Nelson*, 68; John A. Sibley, “Harnessing the Sun,” *Scientific American*, June 1942, 284-97; “World’s First Sun-Heated Home,” *Life*, 2 May 1949, 90, 93; “Solar Heating Report: Use of Sun’s Rays for Houses Seen Practical in Some Areas,” *New York Times*, 30 Nov. 1949; Eugene Ayres, “Power from the Sun,” *Scientific American*, Aug. 1950, 16-21.

<sup>64</sup> Closson’s advertisement; Dodge advertisement; Robb & Stucky Co. advertisement; Oulla’s advertisement; Adelaide Handy, “1950 Home Filled with Latest Gadgets,” *Miami Herald*, 8 Jan. 1950; “Combine Wood, Metal, Fabric,” *News-Herald* (Franklin, PA), 14 Sept. 1950; “Grand Rapids Market”; Hillyer, “Designing Woman”; “In the Showrooms: Summer Furniture,” 132; Foote, “Lightweight Lawn Furniture”; “Furniture Offers Big Outdoor Choice”; Betty Pepis, “For Terraces Inside and Out,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1950; “Furniture That Can Stay Out.”

<sup>65</sup> Civilian Production Administration, *Minutes of the War Production Board*, 366.

<sup>66</sup> For example, see Charles E. Egan, “Manganese Output To Be Lifted 1400%,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1942; “Textiles Curb Tightened,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1944; “Shortage Of Tents Called ‘Alarming,’” *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1944.

civilian goods in the late 1940s and 1950s. Although this was not the case for Sol-Air furniture (army duck was nothing new, nor were sling seats, which had been used in military campaign furniture since the nineteenth century), names associated with the recent war imparted a feeling of newness and high technology onto the products.<sup>67</sup> The militaristic names also implied that, like defence products, the outdoor furniture was tough enough to withstand the harshest conditions, while simultaneously reminding American consumers of the country's recent victory, a victory that created the post-war conditions in which it was considered patriotic to spend money on things like new furniture.<sup>68</sup> The associations with technology and science reiterated the technological and scientific associations suggested by the furniture's forms.

The July 1950 feature article on Sol-Air in *House & Garden*, likely taking cues from information provided by the Swansons and/or Ficks Reed, touted many of the same modern qualities highlighted in the marketing. The article title, "Air Minded," reinforced the lightness of the furniture. The article went on to explain that the furniture could be used both indoors and outdoors, and when used indoors, it brought the freshness of the nature inside: "With cool as a cucumber furniture, you can give your living room the airiness of a terrace." This was accomplished, the article suggested, by the technological design of the furniture, which supposedly encouraged air flow around the room. The article promised that the furniture was "light enough to move easily, adapted to many uses." Physical lightness in modern furniture was usually attributed to the use of new materials (even though, in this case, wrought iron rod was not a new material and the furniture was actually quite heavy). In the model rooms pictured, earthy terra cotta tones and copious plants further suggested a connection with the outdoors (figs. 19-20).<sup>69</sup> The "adobe" colour palette, an

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<sup>67</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Waterproofing and Mildewproofing of Cotton Duck," *Farmers' Bulletin*, Oct. 1920, 3-5; Nicholas A. Brawer, "Victorian Campaign Furniture," *Magazine Antiques*, Sept. 2000, 350-51.

<sup>68</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 125-27.

<sup>69</sup> It is not known who designed the model rooms and styled the photoshoot for the *House & Garden* article. Pipsan may

“abaca” hemp rug, and sun tiles around the fireplace brought to mind indigenous Latin and Southwestern America—faraway culturally, if not geographically, for many *House & Garden* readers. In one photograph, the model was in a relaxed, informal position, lounging on a Sol-Air sofa with a refreshing beverage. In the other photograph, she perused a book while dressed in a playsuit, a modern garment associated with warm-weather leisure activities, and seated on the ground in a cross-legged position associated with non-Western cultures.<sup>70</sup> Racialized stereotypes portrayed non-Western cultures as less developed than industrialized nations and therefore less alienated from the natural world. The *House & Garden* feature article, advertisements, and newspaper articles established Sol-Air as a line of modern furniture that embraced the future yet was close to nature.

### Conclusion

Like the Saarinen-Swanson Group and Flexible Home Arrangements, Sol-Air was rooted in Pipsan’s interior design work. Pipsan had been interested in metal frame and sling seat furniture for at least ten years. She and her collaborators were able to realize their own refined and updated versions of such furniture, which had to withstand the elements and support the weight and shape of a human body, through trial and error as well as collaboration between the designer team, the factory owner, and craftspeople. The finished products were framed by designers and marketers to align with cultural trends, including an interest in scientific and technological developments, fascination with warm-weather destinations and exotic cultures, and indoor-outdoor living.

Unlike the two earlier lines, Pipsan was the head designer of Sol-Air, and she was initially solely credited for the line in publicity. This put her in an ideal position to develop her reputation as an independent furniture designer at a time when it was unusual for women to be engaged in the

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have had some say in the interior design since some of her glassware designs were used along with Sol-Air furniture.  
<sup>70</sup> “Air Minded,” 72-73.

field. By Pipsan acting as a head designer of a family partnership, with her husband in a subservient role, she was departing from gender normative expectations that a wife's accomplishments should not overshadow those of her husband. Sol-Air was also different from the two earlier lines because it was designed for the Swansons' own home. Therefore, in a certain respect, Pipsan's involvement in Sol-Air better fulfilled her gender normative obligations as a middle-class wife, which dictated that it was her job to take care of her home, husband, and children first and foremost. Whereas the earlier two lines supported Bob professionally, Sol-Air at least began by supporting Bob privately. Perhaps framing the line as for their family home helped compensate for the fact that she headed the design of the furniture line. The change in credit to Swanson Associates that followed the initial release demonstrated Pipsan's attempt to negotiate her individual success with her obligations as wife, mother, and member of a family design office. Her duties as wife, mother, and design partner overrode any independent work ambitions she may have had. When Pipsan receded into the shadows after the initial burst of publicity, it was due to personal and societal pressures more than the unwillingness of the design community to acknowledge and promote a woman furniture designer—MoMA, the Merchandise Mart, *Arts and Architecture*, and *Interiors* had all credited Pipsan alone.



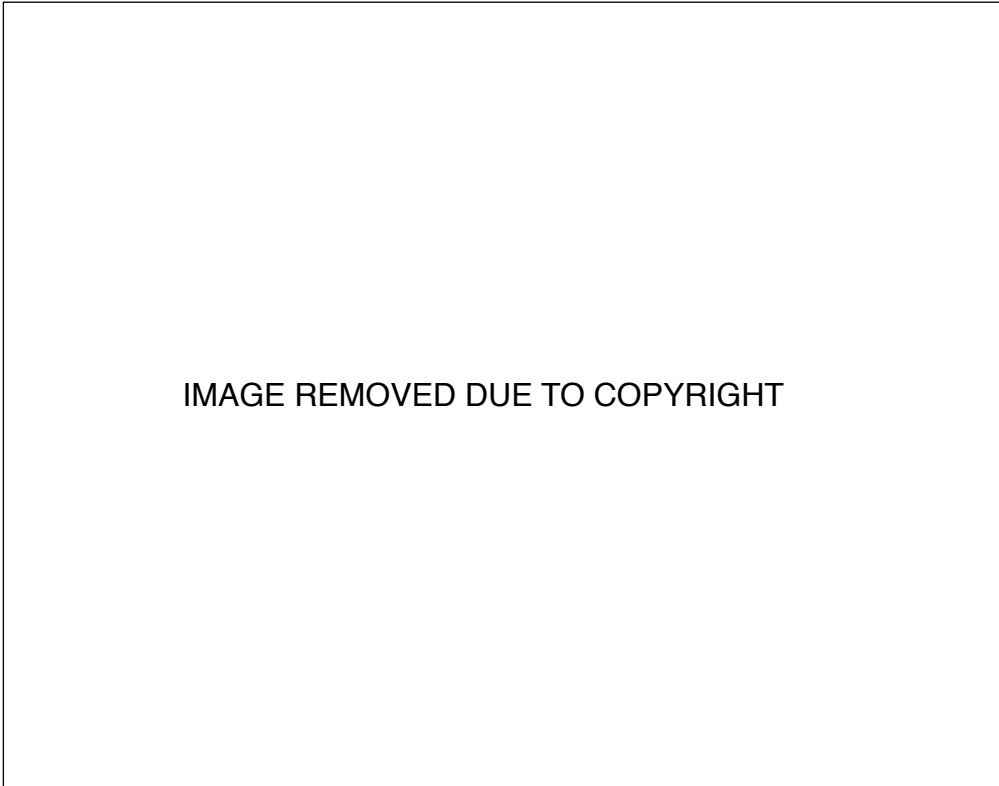


Figure 1. Sol-Air tables and seating, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., in the Swanson residence, ca. June 1950, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

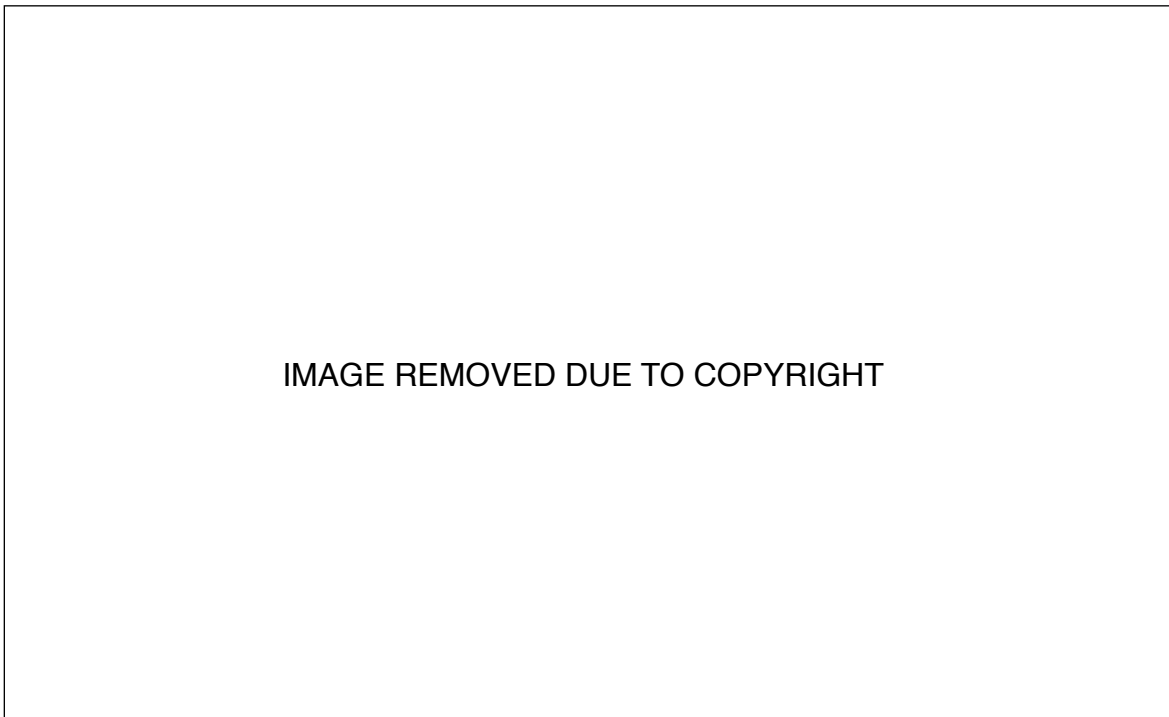


Figure 2. Sol-Air table and seating, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., displayed at the Grand Rapids Winter Furniture Market, Jan. 1950, Michigan (Dale & Marvis Rooks, Collection 230, Michigan and Family History Division, Grand Rapids Public Library)

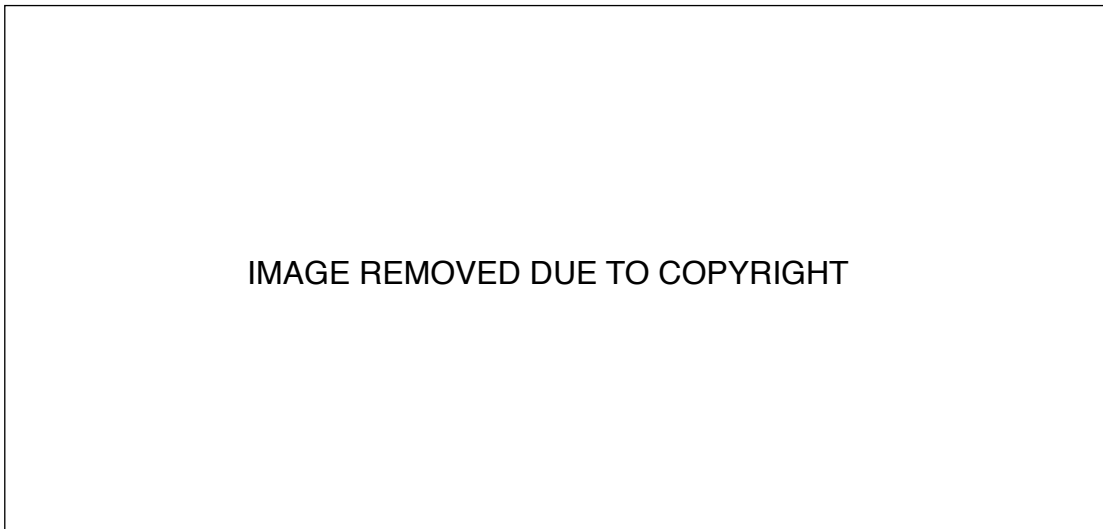


Figure 3. Sol-Air table and lounge chairs, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., released 1950 (LA Modern Auctions website)

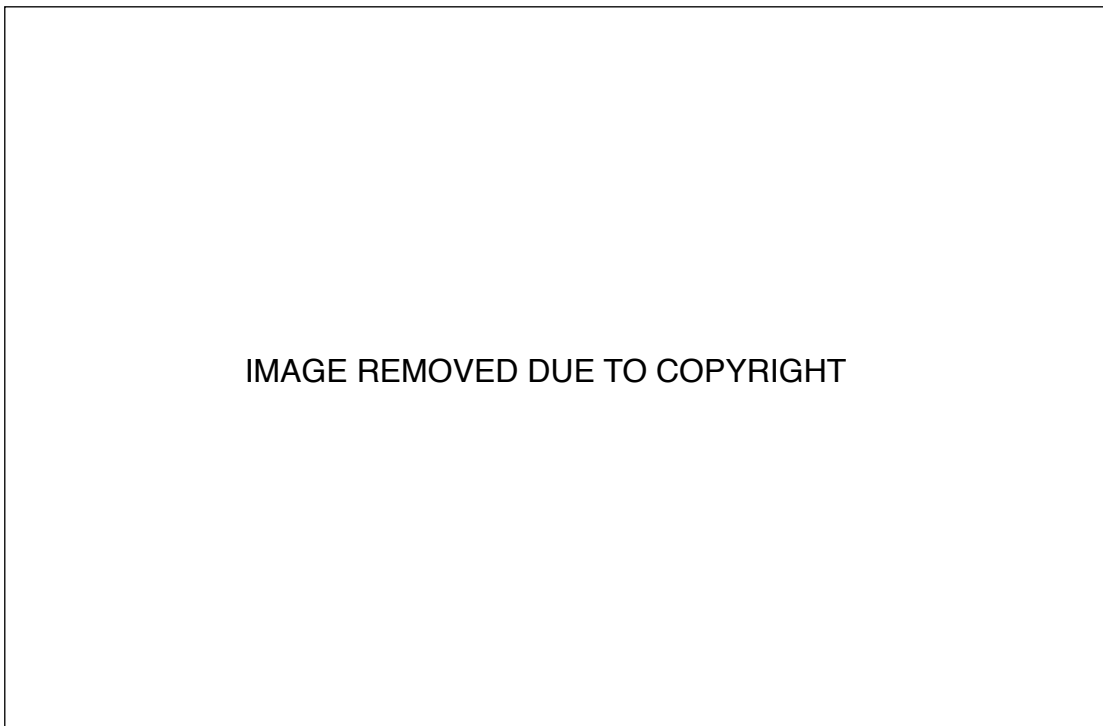


Figure 4. Sol-Air table and chairs, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., released 1950 (LA Modern Auctions website)

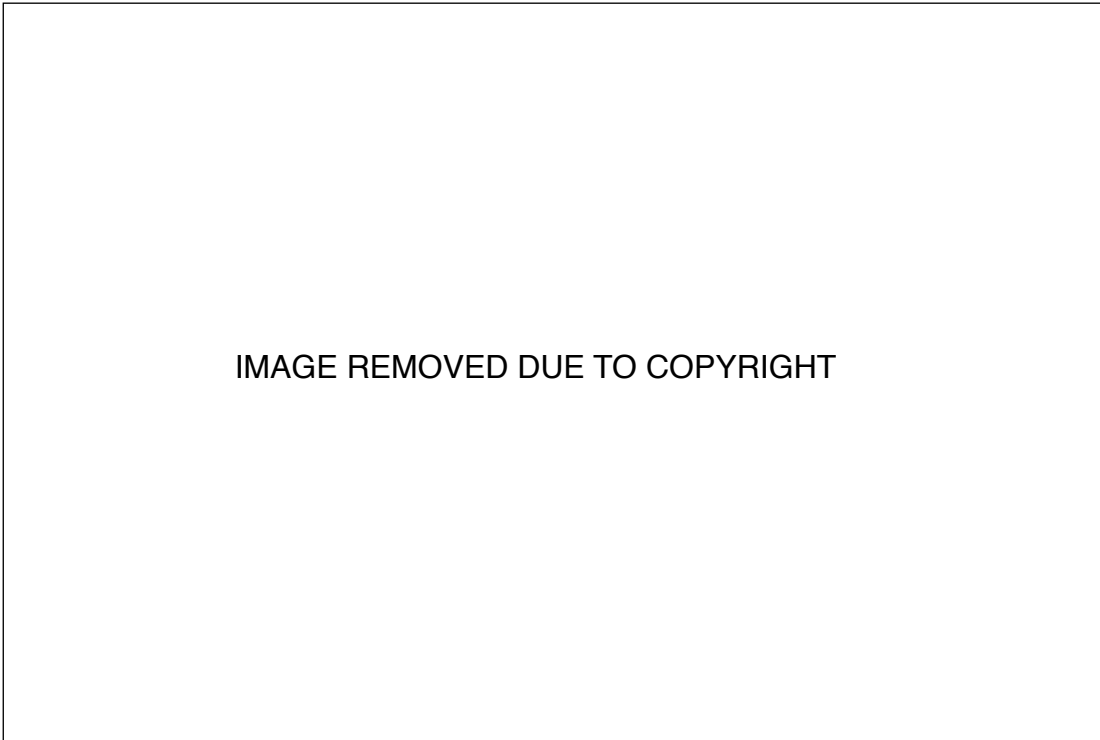


Figure 5. Sol-Air table and benches, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., released 1950 (1stDibs website)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 6. Ficks Reed chairs, outside the Eden residence, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 7. Ficks Reed chairs, outside the Eden residence, interior decorating by Pipsan, 1940, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 8. Sol-Air tables and seating, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., displayed at the Grand Rapids Summer Furniture Market, June 1950, Michigan (Dale & Marvis Rooks, Collection 230, Michigan and Family History Division, Grand Rapids Public Library)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 9. Sol-Air chair, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., released ca. 1952 (Cranbrook Art Museum, 1989.46)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 10. Sol-Air table, designed by Pipsan with Bob and Bob Jr., released ca. 1952 (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

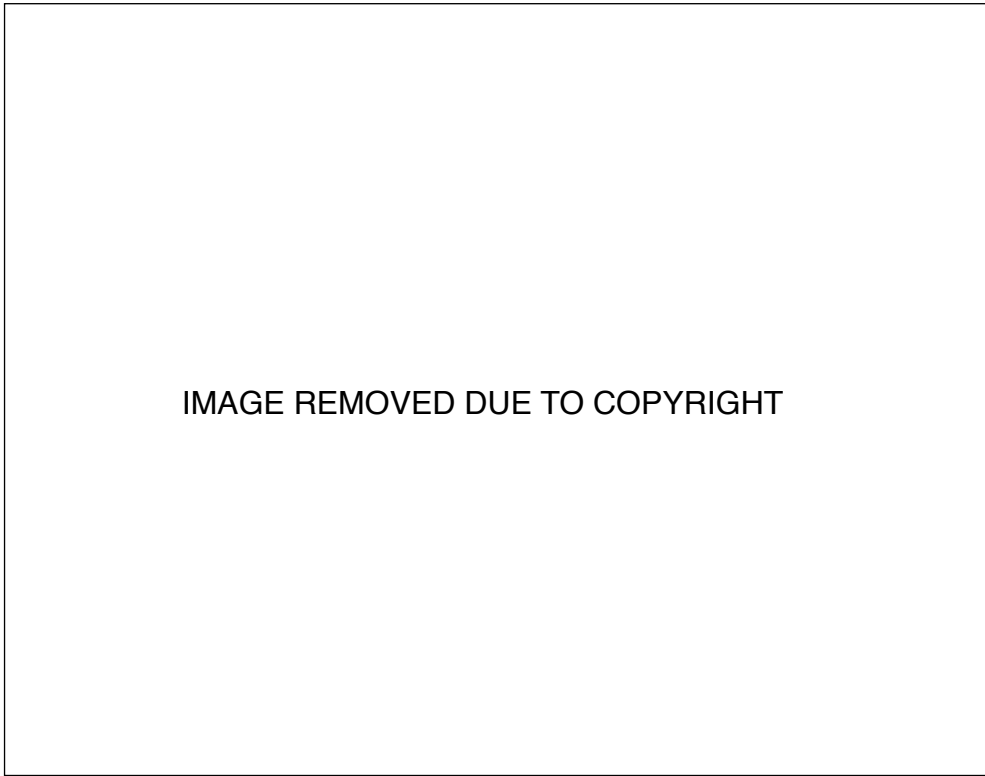


Figure 11. Yellow Sol-Air lounge chair, displayed at the *Good Design* exhibition, 1950-1951, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York (Museum of Modern Art website)

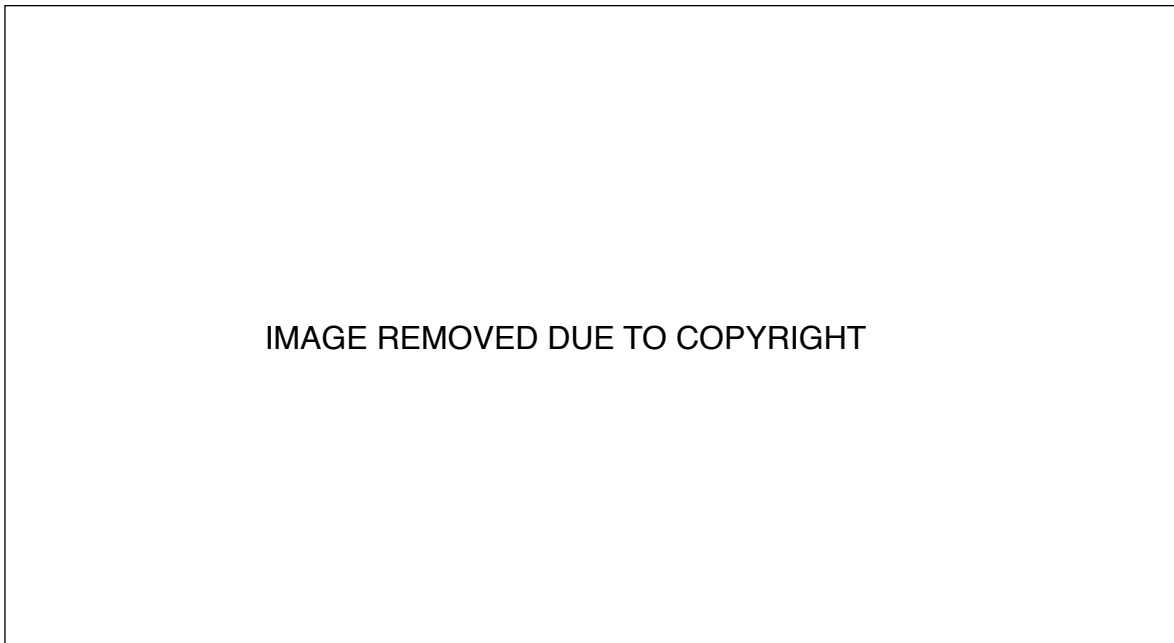


Figure 12. Sol-Air table and benches, displayed at the *Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House*, 1950, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York (Artsy website)

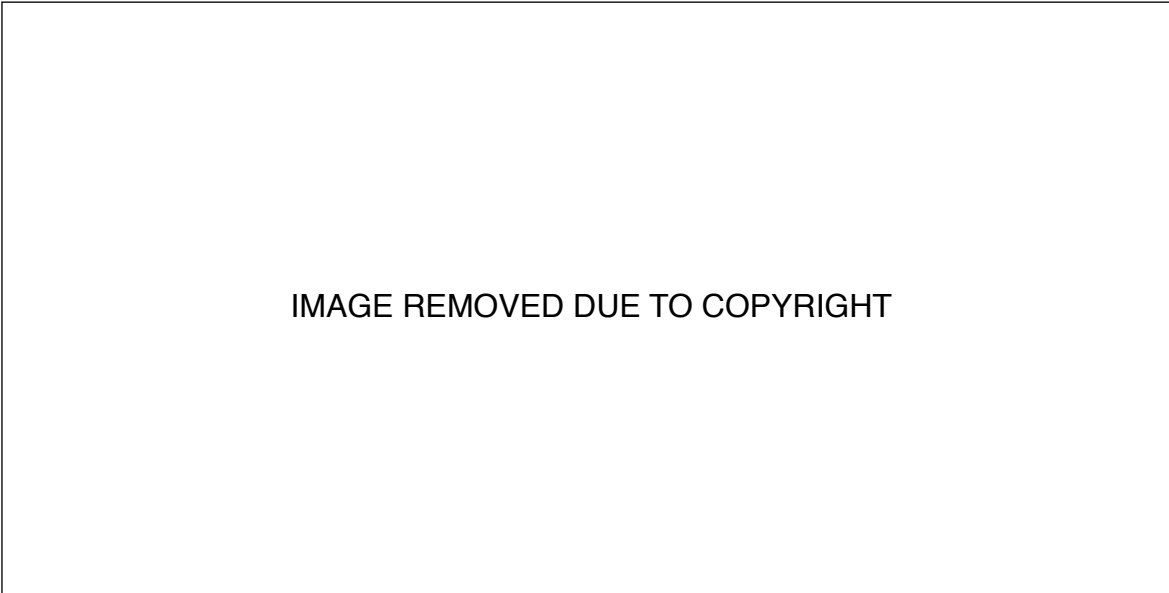


Figure 13. Sol-Air chairs and tables, outside the Raphael Soriano Case Study House, 1950, Pacific Palisades, California (Smith, *Case Study Houses*, 205)

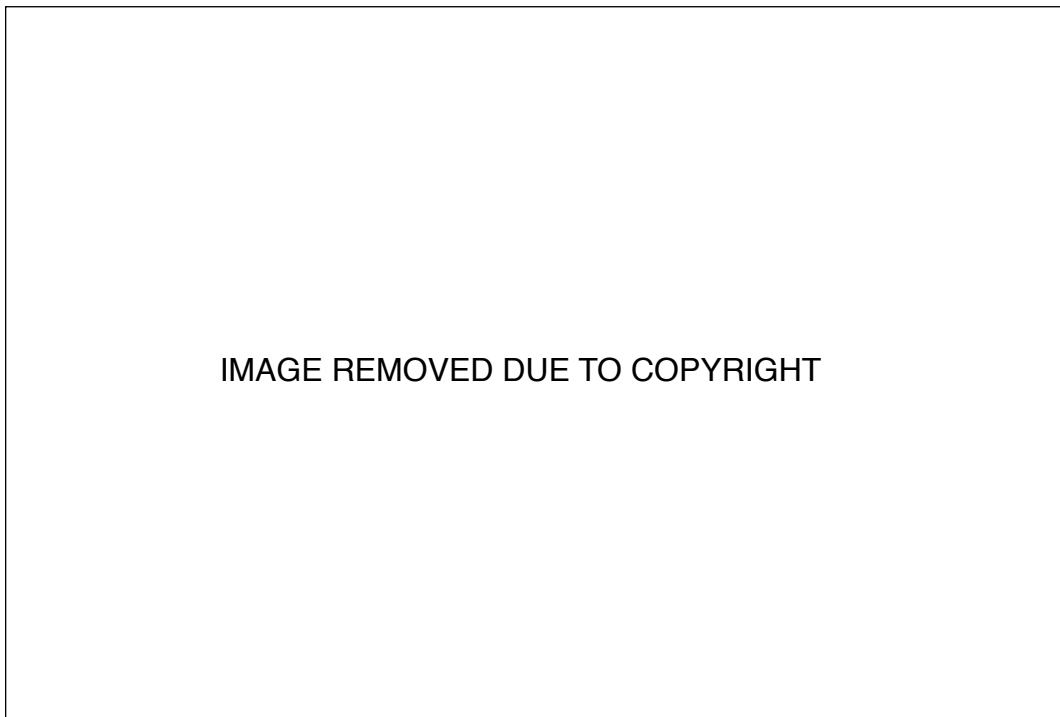


Figure 14. Pipsan drawing furniture, press photograph (*Detroit News*, 2 July 1950)



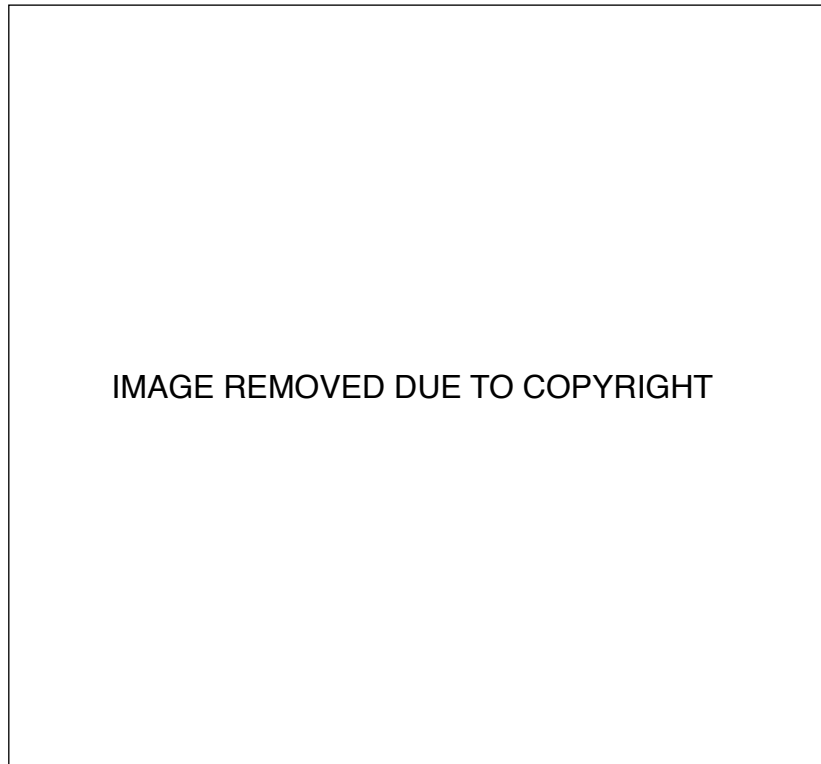


Figure 15. Sol-Air furniture styled with the candelabrum designed by Bob in 1935, in the Swanson residence, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (*Detroit News*, 2 July 1950)

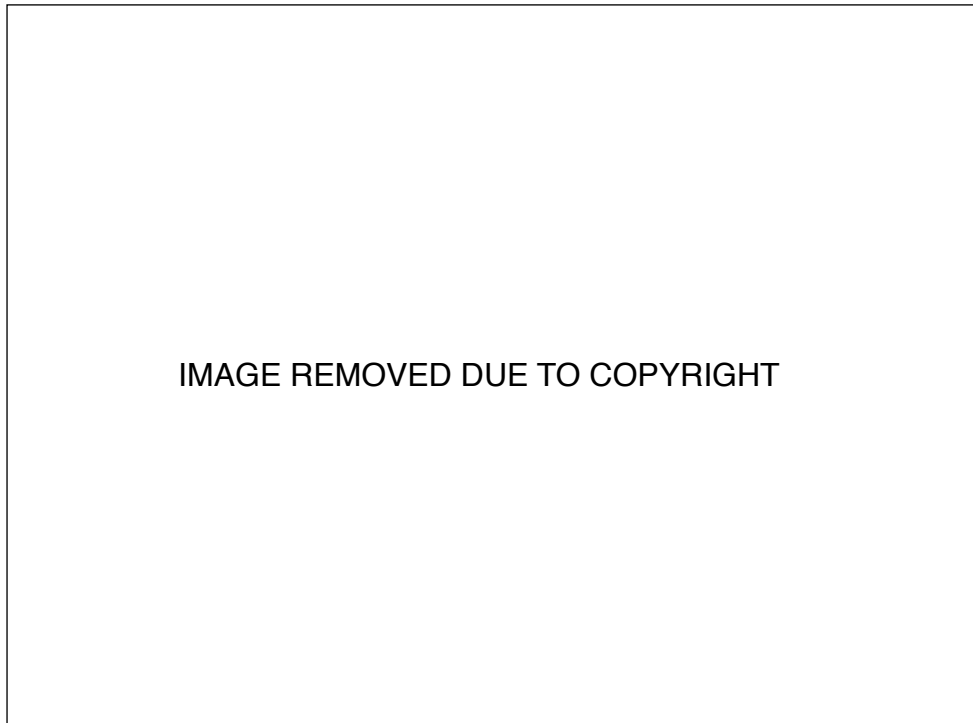


Figure 16. Sol-Air furniture styled with the candelabrum designed by Bob in 1935 (*Arts and Architecture* 67, no. 5, May 1950, 33). A similar photograph was published in *Interiors* 109, no. 8 (March 1950): 132.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 17. Ficks Reed advertisement for Sol-Air (*Interiors* 110, no. 6, Jan. 1951, 30)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 18. Ficks Reed advertisement for furniture designed by Paul Frankl (*Interiors* 111, no. 3, Oct. 1951, 20)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 19. Sol-Air seating and tables, pictured in "Air Minded," a feature article on Sol-Air (*House & Garden*, July 1950, 72)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 20. Sol-Air seating and tables, pictured in "Air Minded," a feature article on Sol-Air (*House & Garden*, July 1950, 73)

## Chapter 8: “Nordic Modern of the Midwest”

As mentioned in chapter 7, in 1955, *Life* magazine invited Pipsan and four other interior decorators/designers to design partial model homes for display at the Chicago Merchandise Mart and publication in the magazine. Pipsan used this opportunity to demonstrate to general-audience readers around the country how she envisioned Sol-Air furniture to be used in an interior. In terms of public visibility, the *Life* article was the most significant piece of press for Sol-Air as well as Pipsan’s career.<sup>1</sup> The model home she designed was similar in style to other of her interiors from the time; these interiors aligned with the brand identity of Sol-Air discussed in chapter 7. *Life* magazine, however, edited and reframed Pipsan’s work to suit the magazine’s own nationalistic and pro-modernism agenda.

### *Life* magazine and regional modernism

*Life* magazine’s goal in the model-home project was to showcase the best interior styles from around the country.<sup>2</sup> The article was titled “Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes” and the related Chicago Merchandise Mart exhibition was called *Look Homeward, America!* Each model home represented the “authentic style” of its respective region.<sup>3</sup> The one Pipsan designed was called “Nordic Modern of the Midwest” (fig. 1). The four others were “Large-Scale Living from the Southwest,” “The Urbanity of the Northeast,” “The Elegance of the Old South,” and “The Coast’s Oriental Style.”

Regionalist design, usually discussed in reference to architecture more than interiors and furnishings, responded to the local materials, climate, ways of living, and traditions of a given region.

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<sup>1</sup> The model home was also published in *Interiors*. “Shades of Americana from Five Members of the A.I.D.,” *Interiors* 114, no. 7 (Feb. 1955): 87.

<sup>2</sup> “Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes,” *Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 115.

<sup>3</sup> “Cross-Country Roundup,” 115.

Typically, a regionalist approach required architects, using their expert knowledge, to respond to the environmental and cultural subtleties of a region. *Life* magazine took more of a grass-roots view, presenting regionalism as a manifestation of the people, land, and climate, rather than an expert's response to it: "Style in architecture and furnishings is the creation of a region, shaped by its climate, by the background and customs of its inhabitants and by its native raw materials."<sup>4</sup> According to this conception, the region created the style, not an architect or designer. The magazine insinuated that the interior decorators, whose work was featured, accurately portrayed regional styles rather than played an active role in forming them: "The five regional homes shown on these pages.... have been furnished in authentic style by distinguished members of the American Institute of Decorators." The magazine portrayed the decorator's role as understanding and replicating established styles. Since the interwar period, interior decorators had argued that their job was more than imitating and assembling, but rather required expertise, intellect, artistry, creativity, and innovation.<sup>5</sup> Although *Life* magazine did not speak of interior decorators pejoratively, it nonetheless perpetuated a long-held stigma that, in many decorators' eyes, degraded their work.

The regional model home project aligned with *Life* magazine's ongoing two-prong crusade to, first of all, define, guide, and celebrate American culture and, second, to promote modern architecture and design.<sup>6</sup> The title of the 1955 *Life* model home exhibition, *Look Homeward, America!*, implied that the best in interior design was found right at home in the United States. The article explained that although regional styles were born of certain areas in the country, they could be adapted to any location due to recent advances in heating and cooling that reduced the need for architecture to be determined by climate. In the 1950s, such technological achievements that

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<sup>4</sup> "Cross-Country Roundup," 115.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see "The Future of the Decorator," *Interior Decorator* 96, no. 2 (Sept. 1936): 15, 66-67; and Dan Cooper, "What is a Decorator?" *Interiors* 106, no. 1 (Aug. 1946): 138, 140.

<sup>6</sup> Baughman, "Who Read *Life*?" 42; Erika Doss, "Introduction," 11-13.

provided possibility and free choice were often framed as triumphs of American democratic capitalism.<sup>7</sup> While the regional homes included in the exhibition and article were designed in both modern and traditional styles, the article affirmed *Life*'s established bias for the former. The modern homes (Southwest, Midwest, and West Coast) received larger amounts of space—they each had full spreads—and the two traditional homes (Northeast and Old South) shared a spread. Regional modernism had been discussed in the design community since the 1940s as either the future of modern architecture or a more practical, humanistic, and democratic alternative to the International Style, viewed by some as paternalistic and foreign. A regionalist approach stood in striking contrast to the International Style, which sought, as its name suggests, a design language that transcended local and national differences. Influential proponents of regional modernism in the 1940s and early 1950s included MoMA curator Elizabeth Mock, critic Lewis Mumford, and *House Beautiful* editor Elizabeth Gordon.<sup>8</sup> The title of the *Life* article, “Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes,” suggested that the magazine was like a cowboy—an iconic figure in American cultural mythology—who had herded the home styles in the wild and, based on the larger quantity of modern homes and their prominence in the layout, proposed regional modernism as the choicest breed of homes. Any foreign influences had been domesticated.

### *Life*'s agenda and Pipsan's interiors

Pipsan explained that *Life* instructed her to design her model home according to a specific regional theme: “I was requested to design a contemporary Living-Kitchen [*sic*] area suitable for our midwest

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<sup>7</sup> See Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Liane Lefaivre, “Critical Regionalism: A Facet of Modern Architecture since 1945,” in *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World*, eds. Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 24-41; Penick, *Tastemaker*, 165-78.



climatic and living conditions and which would also have some Scandinavian background.”<sup>9</sup> Per common usage, the magazine used the terms “Scandinavian” and “Nordic” interchangeably.<sup>10</sup> To fulfil the Scandinavian/Nordic requirement, Pipsan took the colour palette of her model home from an eighteenth-century Finnish *ryjy* rug that belonged to the Saarinen family (fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> She also decorated the model home with modern furnishings designed by Scandinavian designers, including work by herself, family members, and friends (figs. 3-5). Most of the furniture were Sol-Air products, including a sofa, coffee table, and side chair in the living area; rattan dining chairs; and a lounge chair outside the home. These were among the most prominent furnishings in the published photographs. Pipsan designed the printed curtain fabric and the glass stemware, ashtray, and vase. Bob designed the andirons, candelabrum, flower holder (all Saarinen-Swanson Group products), and a leather chair, while Bob Jr. designed a high-fidelity speaker cabinet. The placemats were by Marianne Strengell and the lighting fixtures were by Paavo Tynell, a well-known Finnish designer under whom Pipsan had studied metalworking in Finland.<sup>12</sup>

While Pipsan reasonably complied with *Life*'s direction on how to design her model home, she did not necessarily alter her interior design style for the project. Pipsan had used textiles similar to Strengell's since the 1930s (see chapter 5) and she used lighting fixtures similar to Tynell's in other interiors from 1948 and 1956.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in the *Life* home, Pipsan did not restrict herself to furnishings with a Scandinavian connection. She included artifacts from or inspired by various other cultures, including a “totem pole,” painted “Mexican Pottery,” and a pillow with a vaguely indigenous-style pattern (figs. 5-9).<sup>14</sup> Pipsan employed a similar decorating formula in other of her

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<sup>9</sup> Pipsan, “Look Homeward, America” project statement, 1955, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>10</sup> Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, “Scandinavianism—A Cultural Brand,” in *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth: Fifty Years of Design from the Nordic Countries*, eds. Widar Halén et al. (Stockholm: Arvinius Förlag, 2003), 17.

<sup>11</sup> “The Rug that Started it All,” *Detroit Free Press*, 20 March 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Pipsan, “Look Homeward, America.”

<sup>13</sup> “The Birmingham National Bank,” *Weekly Bulletin: Michigan Society of Architects*, 14 Sept. 1948, 5; Photographs of J. R. Adams residence, 1956, box 10, folder 11, SP.

<sup>14</sup> Pipsan, “Look Homeward, America.”

interiors from the time, such as the modern addition on her own home, for which Sol-Air was originally designed. In staged photographs of the addition taken around 1956, Pipsan complemented Sol-Air and other modern furniture with the same totem pole, indigenous-style painted pottery, a rush rug, and a large floor drum (figs. 10-11). A few years later, in a 1958 model interior designed for a national advertising campaign promoting Pittsburgh Paints, Pipsan again used indigenous-style ceramics as well as the same pillow used in the *Life* home (fig. 12).<sup>15</sup> A photograph of Pipsan was included in the Pittsburgh Paint advertisement in which she posed next to the same totem pole (fig. 13).

In post-war America, many modernist designers, including the Eameses, Alexander Girard, and George Nelson, were interested in artefacts from non-industrialized and Eastern cultures, primarily for their aesthetic value. Viewed as exotic and “primitive,” such artefacts, when included in a modern interior, were believed to humanize the simple forms and industrial materials that often characterized modern design.<sup>16</sup> In Pipsan’s interiors, the handcrafted appearance of the indigenous-style furnishings contrasted with the technological and scientific forms of Sol-Air furniture (discussed in chapter 7). The *Life* home included additional technological elements: a television, a high-fidelity speaker cabinet, and a stainless-steel warming oven and dishwasher (fig. 13). *Life* magazine also interpreted the large windows in Pipsan’s home as a technological feat; it stated that such “window walls” were possible to have in the Midwest—where summers were hot and winters were cold—due to recent advances in heating and cooling technology that allowed residents to control their home climate.<sup>17</sup>

In both the *Life* model home and the Swansons’ home, Pipsan presented Sol-Air furniture as

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<sup>15</sup> For a close-up of the pillow, see photographs of the Pittsburgh Paints model interior, box 13, folder 16, SP.

<sup>16</sup> See Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 143-200. See also Monica Obniski, “Accumulating Things: Folk Art and Modern Design in the Postwar American Projects of Alexander H. Girard” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> “Cross-Country Roundup,” 115.

close to nature. In both interiors, she brought nature into the rooms with Sol-Air through large palm plants (figs. 11, 15). The Swansons' living-room addition was a transitional space that blended the inside of the home with the outdoors. Enclosed in glass, the addition granted inhabitants with a nearly unobstructed view of the surrounding woods. The photographs of Sol-Air in the space were angled to look out the glass walls and provide Sol-Air furniture with a backdrop of nature, without any hint of the traditional masonry used in the rest of the English revival style house. In the *Life* home, there were large floor-to-ceiling windows on two walls that provided an expansive view outside. Natural materials inside the home included the rattan on the Sol-Air chairs, multiple varieties of wood, and several types of rough stone on the kitchen and dining room floor, one wall, and around the fireplace. Pipsan intended the fireplace to be used for indoor grilling, bringing an activity typically done outside in the home, further blending the indoors and out.<sup>18</sup> The way Pipsan styled Sol-Air furniture in the *Life* home and her own home resembled the brand identity of Sol-Air as established in the marketing, which framed the furniture as close to nature and associated the products with exotic, scientific, and technological connotations.<sup>19</sup>

The references to nature, non-Western cultures, and technology were present in some of the photographs taken of the *Life* model home, but they were either not present or deemphasized in those that *Life* selected for publication. In the large central photograph in the spread, the television was only partially visible (fig. 3). In the right photograph, the entire television cubby was included in the image frame, but the television itself was concealed behind a sliding door cover (fig. 4). The high-fidelity speaker cabinet was not included in any of the published photographs. The kitchen—the locus of the modern technology in the home—was only partially visible in one published photograph, the large central one, but the dishwasher, warming oven, and other stainless-steel

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<sup>18</sup> Pipsan, "Look Homeward, America."

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 7.

appliances were not visible (fig. 3). The qualities of the home that blended the indoors and outdoors were also diminished in the published photographs. The camera frame of the large central photograph stopped just short of where the large expanse of glass windows began (fig. 3). The smaller photograph depicting the outside of the home, at the bottom left of the spread, was taken from an angle that foreshortened the windows, making them appear smaller (fig. 5). The other window wall was included in the large central photograph, but the windows themselves were concealed by the closed curtains (fig. 3). Perhaps the interior was photographed with the curtains closed because the view out the windows was artificial and unappealing, being that the model home was located inside the Merchandise Mart. But if the photographer, or whoever directed the photoshoot, had wanted to feature the large expanses of glass that broke down the barrier between inside and outside, the home could have been photographed from the outside looking in through the glass. Such a shot was in fact used to photograph the two traditional-style homes, looking into them through mullioned windows (figs. 16-17). In the published photographs of Pipsan's model home, so too were the non-Western elements deemphasized. The totem pole was one inch tall on the printed page; at this small size, it blended in with the wood siding (figs. 5-6). The pillow was largely cropped out of the large central image, obscuring the indigenous-style pattern (fig. 3). And the "Mexican bowl" was not visible in any of the published photographs.

The fundamental concept of *Life* magazine, when founded by Henry Luce, was to use photographs to show the world to its readers. The magazine aimed to tell its stories primarily through images. Editors, however, chose the images and arranged them in such a way that supported their pre-determined narratives. Editors were so heavy handed that some photographers felt that their work was manipulated or sensationalized and their subjects misrepresented.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Pipsan's model home, editors chose photographs, cropped images, and arranged them on the

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<sup>20</sup> Doss, "Introduction," 1-2, 14-17.

page in such a way that edited Pipsan's work to better conform with the story editors decided to tell before the model home was designed. The non-Western artefacts were not understood as Nordic nor Midwestern American, and they were edited out. Unlike these elements, the text of the article did mention the modern technology (window walls, stainless steel appliances, television, high-fidelity speaker, and warming oven). By deemphasizing them in the photographs, the magazine made the modern home look more traditional. Editing elements of Pipsan's interior that did not address the assignment she was given by *Life*—to design a home suited to the climate and lifestyle of the Midwest that also had “some Scandinavian background”—helped lay the groundwork for the magazine to argue that there existed such a thing as a Nordic Midwestern Modern style.

### The myth of the American origins of modern design

The notion that Nordic modernism was a characteristically Midwestern American style of home was grounded in recent theories about the history of modern design. In the 1940s, a myth began to form in the design world that claimed modern design originated in pre-1900 America. Prior, America was infrequently celebrated internationally for its aesthetic innovations in architecture and design.

Modern design and architecture were widely understood to have originated in Europe, especially Germany, France, Holland, and the USSR, in the early twentieth century. American design, on the other hand, was generally considered to have been derivative of European developments. When America was praised abroad, outside of a few exceptional architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan, and H. H. Richardson, it was usually for its technological and industrial developments like agricultural machines and industrial production methods.

Approaching the middle of the twentieth century, ideas began to circulate that enhanced the significance of America's technological-industrial innovations. The figure who most inspired a reconsideration of American developments was Sigfried Giedion, a Swiss architectural and

technology historian who wrote an influential history of modern architecture.<sup>21</sup> First published in 1941, *Space, Time and Architecture* connected the industrial innovations of nineteenth-century America to the development of modern architecture. He suggested that in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, certain proto-modern industrial developments, objects, and building types emerged in America that subsequently influenced European modernism. Contrary to popular belief, he claimed, European critics had admired American furniture, hand tools, and machinery for their simplicity, fitness to purpose, undecorated surfaces, accommodation of the body, and beautiful forms. Giedion also cited balloon frame buildings, developed in the Midwest starting in the 1830s, as an American innovation that transformed the building trade from a specialized, labour-intensive craft into an industry. Balloon frame construction used mass-produced materials and unskilled labour to erect buildings rapidly. This innovation, Giedion noted, ultimately enabled European-Americans to conquer the West. After this industrial milestone, a new type of skeletal construction developed towards the end of the century. In the 1880s and 1890s, also in the Midwest, the first iron- and steel-frame structures were designed by Chicago School architects including William Baron Jenney, Daniel Burnham, Sullivan, and Richardson. Giedion suggested that these architects provided “points of departure” for 1920s modern skyscrapers designed by Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, musing that the Chicago School architects and the later European modernists “seem like two stages in the development of the same set of ideas.”<sup>22</sup>

Giedion believed that these nineteenth-century American innovations were built on foundations laid in the eighteenth century and earlier.<sup>23</sup> “The balloon-frame building with its skeleton of thin machine-cut studs and its covering of clapboards grew out of the seventeenth-

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<sup>21</sup> See Douglas Tallack, “Sigfried Giedion, Modernism and American Material Culture,” *Journal of American Studies* 28, no. 2 (1994): 149-67.

<sup>22</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 258-66, 268-73, 291-315.

<sup>23</sup> Giedion, 258.

century farmhouses of the early settlers,” he explained.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, “the plain surface—the flat wall of wood, brick, or stone—has always been a basic element in American architecture.”<sup>25</sup> Giedion also claimed that from the Colonial period into the nineteenth century, American houses had been flexibly designed, with an informal open plan and a structure that allowed for expansion.<sup>26</sup> Another relic of Colonial America, the Windsor chair, supposedly did for furniture what the balloon frame did for architecture: they were both light, simple, and strong.<sup>27</sup> The proto-modern roots in American design ran deep. Giedion’s trans-Atlantic perspective that gave the United States a role—albeit a minor role—in the development of modern architecture and design was a new perspective on history.<sup>28</sup> Such ideas planted the seeds for the post-war myth about American modern design.

The United States emerged from World War II as the world’s strongest economic and industrial power. Many war-time technological and material developments were transfused into designs for civilian products, and for the first time the country was widely recognized internationally as a leader in design. Hubris in the fruits of democratic capitalism were at an all-time high. Certain audacious design writers, editors, and curators amplified the significance of earlier American contributions to modern design, going so far as to challenge long-held beliefs about its origins and America’s supposed supporting role.

A leading proponent of this extreme camp was the prominent arts writer John Kouwenhoven, a Barnard professor and *Harper’s* magazine editor and writer. In a 1941 article in the *Atlantic Monthly* called “Arts in America” and subsequent 1948 book called *Made in America*, Kouwenhoven put forth a radical re-evaluation of the history of American arts.<sup>29</sup> Promoting

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<sup>24</sup> Giedion, 276.

<sup>25</sup> Giedion, 278.

<sup>26</sup> Giedion, 285-90.

<sup>27</sup> Giedion, 276-77.

<sup>28</sup> Tallack, “Siegfried Giedion,” 149-54.

<sup>29</sup> John A. Kouwenhoven, “Arts in America,” *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1941, 175-80; John A. Kouwenhoven, *Made in America* (New York: Doubleday, 1948). *Made In America* was published in six editions between 1948 and 1975. In 1967 it was republished as *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*.

American exceptionalism, *Made in America* quickly became a key text in American Studies programs.<sup>30</sup> In the book, Kouwenhoven wholeheartedly rejected the widely accepted idea that throughout history American arts were merely an importation and adaptation of European movements. Rather, he wrote, from the Colonial period to the nineteenth century, America had its own unique artistic tradition that emerged honestly out of the needs of the people in response to their environment. By embracing the machine, science, and technology, what Kouwenhoven called a “democratic-technological vernacular” emerged, untainted by artistic and cultural influences from Europe.

Extrapolating on many of Giedion’s ideas, Kouwenhoven similarly argued for the significance of balloon frame construction; the simplicity, honesty, and functionality of American agricultural tools, farming equipment, and farm architecture; and the practicality, openness, and flexibility of American houses.<sup>31</sup> Kouwenhoven viewed such developments as democratic and practical solutions to the needs of daily life. He purported that it was not simply select milestones that allowed the pioneers to conquer the wilderness and settle the West, but that it was due to the entire “democratic-technological vernacular” culture. The same pioneer spirit continued to live on in American culture, claimed Kouwenhoven, and manifested in the nineteenth century in the form of Taylorism and Fordism, which subsequently directly influenced modern developments in Western Europe. In his revisionist history, Kouwenhoven expanded on many of Giedion’s ideas while incorporating a nationalistic tone. Here, the notable American developments were tied to essentialist ideas about the American character and government. In the story of modernism’s development, Kouwenhoven changed America from a peripheral figure to a central actor.

Kouwenhoven’s ideas spread throughout the design world in the United States. In 1949,

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelley Streeby, and Henry Yu, “Introduction,” in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Kouwenhoven, *Made in America*, 61.



shortly after his book came out, Alexander Girard organized the landmark exhibition *For Modern Living* at the DIA. Conceived as a showcase of the best modern designs on the market, the exhibition was meant to catalyze interest in modern design among the general public. Girard had read Kouwenhoven's work and was so impressed that he convinced the DIA director to enlist Kouwenhoven to write the main essay for the exhibition catalogue.<sup>32</sup> In it, Kouwenhoven elaborated on his provocative ideas, directly addressing modern furniture. He went so far as to claim that the key elements of modern furniture originated in America: "Almost all of the basic techniques in the design of modern furniture had their origin in nineteenth century American vernacular design."<sup>33</sup> He then went on to expound on how specific materials and construction associated with European modern design were in fact American inventions. Allegedly, although bent plywood chairs were commonly associated with Alvar Aalto, the innovation was actually owed to American businesses like Gardner & Company in New York that designed bent plywood chairs in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, he purported that decades before the Bauhaus, cantilevered chairs were invented in the United States, citing as examples seats on agricultural machines from the mid-nineteenth century and Pullman train car chairs from the 1910s.<sup>35</sup> Kouwenhoven wrote that the International Style of 1920s and 1930s lost sight of the human needs, comfort, and efficiency that characterized its American progenitors, becoming abstract and theoretical and too focused on aesthetic form.<sup>36</sup>

Kouwenhoven's message was repeated in the DIA exhibition. At the museum, visitors were first greeted with an "Historical Section" on the "background of modern design," which included a case of nineteenth-century hand tools like those lauded by Giedion and Kouwenhoven. An adjacent

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<sup>32</sup> Obniski, "Accumulating Things," 145-46; "Two Museums Give the Public Spectacles," *Interiors* 109, no. 4 (Nov. 1949): 99.

<sup>33</sup> John A. Kouwenhoven, "The Background of Modern Design," in *Exhibition for Modern Living* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1949), 12.

<sup>34</sup> Kouwenhoven, "Background of Modern Design," 14, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Kouwenhoven, 12-15.

<sup>36</sup> Kouwenhoven, 21.

wall in the gallery displayed the evolution of the cantilevered chair. This object timeline included chairs discussed by Kouwenhoven in the catalogue: an 1857 American mowing machine with a cantilevered steel seat, an 1849 American Chair Company centripetal spring chair, and an American Owen Magnetic touring car cantilevered jump seat from 1917. After these American chairs, visitors arrived at tubular steel chairs designed in the late 1920s by Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe. The display of chair development implied that the iconic modern chairs stood on the shoulders of earlier American innovations. Kouwenhoven's narrative about American modernism was central to the argument of the rest of the exhibition: that modernism, as it had fully flowered in its post-war state, was not only aesthetic and technological, but was also practical, humanistic, and democratic.<sup>37</sup>

Similar ideas appeared in the pages of *House Beautiful* after the war and increasingly as of 1950. Historians have shown that under the editorship of Elizabeth Gordon, the magazine promoted a nationalistic view of modern design.<sup>38</sup> Monica Penick's research demonstrates how, under Gordon's leadership, *House Beautiful* espoused an American iteration of modernism that, rather than being defined by any single style, possessed abstract qualities like comfort, informality, convenience, honesty, and practicality—qualities thought to foster personal expression and regional diversity.<sup>39</sup> Lambasting the International Style as overly intellectual, foreign, and undemocratic, Gordon repeatedly denied a European heritage for the post-war modernism promoted in the magazine's pages.<sup>40</sup> Instead, the magazine presented American modernism as an outgrowth of American daily life in the nineteenth century and earlier. Certain articles clarified where this type of modern design came from if not Europe. An article called "America Did It First" claimed that bent

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<sup>37</sup> See Obniski, "Accumulating Things," 126-50, 179.

<sup>38</sup> Penick, *Tastemaker*, 93-128; Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 112-13; and Kathleen LaMoine Corbett, "Tilting at Modern: Elizabeth Gordon's 'The Threat to the Next America'" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Penick, *Tastemaker*, 97.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," *House Beautiful*, April 1953, 126-30; "America Did It First," *House Beautiful*, Dec. 1946, 158; "The Best Modern Architecture has Roots in Our Own Soil," *House Beautiful*, Dec. 1946, 160-61; "How Modern Got This Way," *House Beautiful*, Dec. 1946, 175. See also Penick, *Tastemaker*, 85-86.

plywood chairs and organic forms commonly associated with Aalto and Bruno Mathsson originated in nineteenth-century United States.<sup>41</sup> The best in post-war modern design (i.e., American modern design), the magazine proposed, was based on nineteenth-century American farm houses and even earlier furniture, including eighteenth-century Shaker furniture as well as Windsor chairs, sawback tables, spindle furniture, and slat-back chairs.<sup>42</sup> *House Beautiful* writers lauded these pre-1900 designs for their simplicity, efficiency, and honesty. The arguments in the magazine, presented over the course of many years, were politicized promotions of American developments. As a national magazine consumed by designers and housewives across the country, *House Beautiful* had a more general audience than Kouwenhoven's article and book and a larger audience than the DIA exhibition and catalogue.<sup>43</sup> The specious claim that modern design was born and bred in America was widespread.

Other prominent post-war design writers praised historical American design and related it to modernism in less nationalistic tones. George Nelson, for one, expressed admiration for design developments in America's past. Nelson was a vocal figure in the post-war design world, with various outlets through which he promoted modern design: he was design director at Herman Miller from 1946 to 1972, associate editor of *Architectural Forum* and *Fortune* magazine as of 1935, and contributing editor to *Interiors* from 1948 to 1956. In his post-war writings, Nelson asserted that modern interiors so far lacked humanism and honesty and were not sufficiently attuned to the needs and individuality of inhabitants. As an example in times past when such admirable qualities were achieved, Nelson cited Colonial design and architecture.<sup>44</sup> He claimed that Colonial architecture

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<sup>41</sup> "America Did It First," 158.

<sup>42</sup> "How Modern Got This Way," 175; "What Makes Us Americans?" *House Beautiful*, May 1950, 124-27; Mary Roche, "The American Ideal of Leveling Up," *House Beautiful*, May 1950, 133.

<sup>43</sup> On the circulation of *House Beautiful*, see Introduction.

<sup>44</sup> George Nelson, "Problems of Design: Modern Decoration," *Interiors* 109, no. 4 (Nov. 1949): 68-75.

expressed a “genuine concern for human values.”<sup>45</sup> He believed Colonial kitchens prioritized utility and the workings of daily life. With their low ceilings and enclosed structure, Colonial kitchens as well as living rooms also addressed inhabitants’ physical and psychological need to feel “snug.”<sup>46</sup> Like other modernists, Nelson admired the Windsor chair, a design long associated with early America that continued to be popular into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> While for some it was an icon of a quaint American past, modernists celebrated the Windsor chair for its simple parts, smooth surfaces, strong construction, and light appearance and weight.<sup>48</sup> For Nelson, Colonial design was not the same as Colonial Revival, which he derided as a dishonest style.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Kouwenhoven, Girard, and Gordon, Nelson never espoused a reconsideration of the history of modern design nor did he relate historical American design to democracy or any notion of American essentialism or exceptionalism. Yet, given his many platforms, his admiration of Colonial design would have brought attention to historical American material culture and encouraged a re-evaluation of its merits, especially in relation to modern design.

### Nordic Midwestern Modern design

*Life* magazine’s concept of a regional Nordic Midwestern Modern style tied into the myth-making that relocated the origins of post-war modern design from interwar Europe to earlier in America. The photographs of Pipsan’s model home as well as the language used to describe it perpetuated the notion that modernism, specifically Scandinavian modernism, actually originated in the United States and that the Midwest played a special role in its development.

In the 1950s, modern design from the Scandinavian countries was conceived as a distinct

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<sup>45</sup> George Nelson, “Problems of Design: The Enlargement of Vision,” *Interiors* 111, no. 4 (Nov. 1951): 111.

<sup>46</sup> George Nelson, “The Dead-End Room,” *Interiors* 108, no. 4 (Nov. 1948): 87.

<sup>47</sup> Abercrombie, *George Nelson*, 29; Nelson and Wright, *Tomorrow’s House*, 118; Nelson, “The Furniture Industry,” 106.

<sup>48</sup> Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1953), 7.

<sup>49</sup> Rhoads, “The Long and Unsuccessful Effort to Kill off the Colonial Revival,” 21.

style—one that was reported to be an especially popular variant of modernism among the American public. The most significant factor in this development was the *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition, which began touring the country in 1954. Met with widespread enthusiasm, the exhibition is generally credited for establishing and popularizing the concept of Scandinavian design, in which Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes all designed in a relatively monolithic variant of modernism broadly characterized by natural materials, simple forms, and high-quality finishing.<sup>50</sup> Pipsan's *Life* model home shared certain visual qualities with domestic interiors pictured in the *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue. In both Pipsan's *Life* home and the Aaltos' Villa Mairea, published in the catalogue, there were a profusion of thin wood panelling, a variety of woods, and an open free-flowing plan (fig. 18). Other design elements that appeared in Pipsan's *Life* home as well as the *Design in Scandinavia* catalogue included: rattan chairs with iron rod frames, wood tables with hairpin legs, seating furniture with boxy foam cushions, deep-pile rugs, metal cone lighting fixtures, free-flowing glassware, textured upholstery fabrics, and textiles printed with geometric yet painterly patterns (figs. 19-22).

Design scholar Jørn Guldberg has argued that, although there were certain general physical attributes shared by many of the objects in the *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition, the concept of Scandinavian design largely relied on values associated with the objects. The designs, he argues, were understood in the United States by how they were described in human terms more than their physical qualities. Contemporary commentary on the exhibition highlighted aspects of Scandinavian culture, including a focus on the home and family, the importance of handcraft and traditions, and closeness to nature—all characteristics that were also celebrated in post-war America. Critics such as

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<sup>50</sup> Hildi Hawkins, "Finding a Place in the New World Order: Finland, America, and the 'Design in Scandinavia' Exhibition of 1954-57," in *Finnish Modern Design: Utopian Ideals and Everyday Realities, 1930-97*, eds. Marianne Aav and Nina Stritzler-Levine (New Haven: Yale University Press published for the Bard Graduate Center, 1998), 237-38.

a *New York Times* journalist suggested that Americans needed to be told what the designs meant in order to understand them and, ultimately, desire them.<sup>51</sup>

When Scandinavian design was experiencing exceptional popularity in the United States, Sol-Air furniture, which possessed some of the same features as Scandinavian design, were displayed in an environment with other elements sometimes associated with Scandinavian design. The conditions were ripe for the home and its contents to be coded as Scandinavian. To the design connoisseur, similarities existed between Scandinavian design and Pipsan's *Life* home, but *Life*'s general-audience readers might not make the connection. As if to compensate for this potential lapse as well as to pinpoint a visual quality that made the model home Scandinavian/Nordic, *Life* clarified that "the blue, gold and orange color scheme of the room is Scandinavian."<sup>52</sup>

Because *Life* was committed to promoting modernism and defining, guiding, and celebrating middle-class American culture, and because Scandinavian design was currently being celebrated as a variant of modernism that especially appealed to Americans, a connection between Scandinavian design and Midwest America bore promise for the intended narrative—that is, promoting regional modernism as an inherently American modernism. However, promoting Scandinavian modernism was a delicate matter. Even though it was relatively popular in the United States and certain American modernists had long admired Scandinavian designers, some were hesitant to promote their work for political reasons. In 1948, Edgar Kaufmann Jr. had considered curating an exhibition on Scandinavian design at MoMA but deferred because he was concerned that the show would be interpreted as pro-communist.<sup>53</sup> Several years later, during the organization of the *Design in Scandinavia* show, curators were similarly concerned about being accused of promoting

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<sup>51</sup> Jørn Guldberg, "'Scandinavian Design' as Discourse: The Exhibition 'Design in Scandinavia,' 1954-57," *Design Issues* 27, no. 2 (2011): 41-58.

<sup>52</sup> "Cross-Country Roundup," 119.

<sup>53</sup> Harri Kalha, "'Just One of Those Things,'—The Design in Scandinavia Exhibition 1954-1957," in *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth*, 68.

communism.<sup>54</sup> In the year of the *Life* article and exhibition, 1955, the United States was still in the throes of the post-war Red Scare.<sup>55</sup> For the *Life* narrative to work effectively—that is, for it to convincingly promote a Scandinavian modernism while maintaining political correctness—it needed to elucidate how “Nordic Modern of the Midwest” was democratic and American.

The magazine accomplished this by alluding to the special role that the Midwest played in the myth that modern design originated in America. The description of the home explained its connection to the region: “The living-dining-kitchen area shown on these pages reflects the Nordic background of many Midwestern settlers. Yet with its wide, glass window walls, its stainless-steel kitchen appliances, its economy of space, its simply designed furniture, it also reflects the region’s industrial development.” The description listed four key elements of the American revisionist history of modern design: the Midwest, settlers, simple furniture, and industrial development. The term “settler” was typically used to refer to the first Europeans to establish settlements in Colonial America, but in this case, the “Midwestern settlers” was referring to the large number of Scandinavians who immigrated to the Midwest in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Most of these immigrants came in search of land to own and farm, yet many ended up working in mines and mills as well as textile or furniture factories.<sup>56</sup> The immigrants’ work made “industrial development” possible. Along with these working-class immigrants, there was also a well-known concentration of Scandinavian designers at Cranbrook, including the Saarinens, who had come to the Midwest after mass immigration had been outlawed, and for different reasons—to create and teach high design rather than to farm. Although the renowned Scandinavian designers in Michigan were closely connected to the *Life* home by way of Pipsan, neither Cranbrook nor Eliel

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<sup>54</sup> Widar Halén, “Fifty Years of Scandinavian Design—and After,” in *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> On the postwar Red Scare, see Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America*.

<sup>56</sup> Jon Gjerde, “The Scandinavian Migrants,” in *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, ed. Robin Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85-90; A. William Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 7, 20-23, 59-61, 71.

were mentioned. The magazine instead referenced the earlier “settlers” and industrialization. This narrative provided a deeper bond to the land and staked a stronger claim to the Midwestern region than the designers who more recently brought their European ideas to a small creative enclave in Michigan. The humble settler storyline was more all-American than that of the intellectual émigré. Like the myth of the American origins of modern design, the history implied by the *Life* article began in pre-1900 America and culminated in the present day post-war United States.

The relationship between settlers and the Midwest had a broader meaning in the mid-twentieth century. Cultural geographer James R. Shortridge has studied contemporary advertisements, articles, and political cartoons in general-audience magazines to determine the popular image of the Midwest region. His research reveals that, from the 1920s into the 1950s, the Midwest was often characterized as rural even though there were many urban and industrial centres. Like the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Midwest in the second quarter of the twentieth century was envisioned as a place between wilderness and civilization. The region was romanticized as the place in the country where American pioneer virtues—including family values, simplicity, closeness to the land, and ingenuity—were preserved. More than other regions, the Midwest was viewed as representative of the true American character.<sup>57</sup> In Pipsan’s *Life* home, the people staged in the photographs reinforced these traditional Midwestern values. The stereotype of the all-American family was pictured: a happy stay-at-home mom, busy at work in the kitchen while keeping an eye on her kids playing in the combination living area. This was the only model home in the *Life* article that pictured a mother and children. Through the photographic staging of the model home and the text of the article, *Life* magazine clarified that “Nordic Modern of the Midwest” was an American regional modern style built on American history and American values.

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<sup>57</sup> See James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).



## Conclusion

For the *Life* model home, even though Pipsan had relative freedom in designing the interior of the space and she included many furnishings that she herself designed, she did not ultimately control how her interiors and the furnishings within them were mediated to the public. *Life* magazine determined what Pipsan's model home was called, the manner it was discussed, and how it was pictured. Most elements of the Sol-Air brand identity, as established by the Swansons and Ficks Reed in the marketing and reiterated in Pipsan's 1950s interiors, were not present in the Nordic Midwestern Modern home. The line's name was nowhere mentioned, even though Pipsan specified "Sol-Air" twice in her project statement submitted to *Life*.<sup>58</sup> Also absent were other elements of the Sol-Air brand identity: allusions to warm-weather and exotic cultures, indoor-outdoor living, and modern technology and science. In *Life* magazine, various connections—both implicit and explicit through image and word—between Scandinavian design, modern design, and the Midwestern United States ultimately made an argument for an American modern style, one that might appeal to Americans' tastes and values. *Life* magazine's and Pipsan's agendas overlapped in that they both were bent on selling American consumers on modern design, yet the magazine departed from what is known of Pipsan's vision for her work. The magazine used parts of her identity, namely her Finnish heritage and her reputation as a modernist designer, to expound on the idea that recently popular Scandinavian modernism was actually rooted in nineteenth-century America. It added another layer to the myth that modernism originated in pre-1900 America by implying that the heritage of the "Nordic Modern of the Midwest" style were Scandinavian settlers who became industrial workers. This radical notion was reinforced by romantic ideas about the history and current state of the Midwest region. Pipsan, a modernist Finnish interior designer who lived and

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<sup>58</sup> Pipsan, "Look Homeward, America."

worked in the Midwest, was an ideal linchpin for these different mythical threads. Pipsan's identity and work provided the raw material with which *Life* magazine crafted yet another argument for American design hegemony in past and present.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 1. Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois, published in "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes" (*Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 116-17)

IMAGE REMOVED  
DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 2. Eighteenth-century Finnish *ryijy* rug belonging to the Saarinen family (photograph by the author of the rug hanging in the Saarinen residence)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 3. Closeup of figure 1: published photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 4. Closeup of figure 1: published photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois

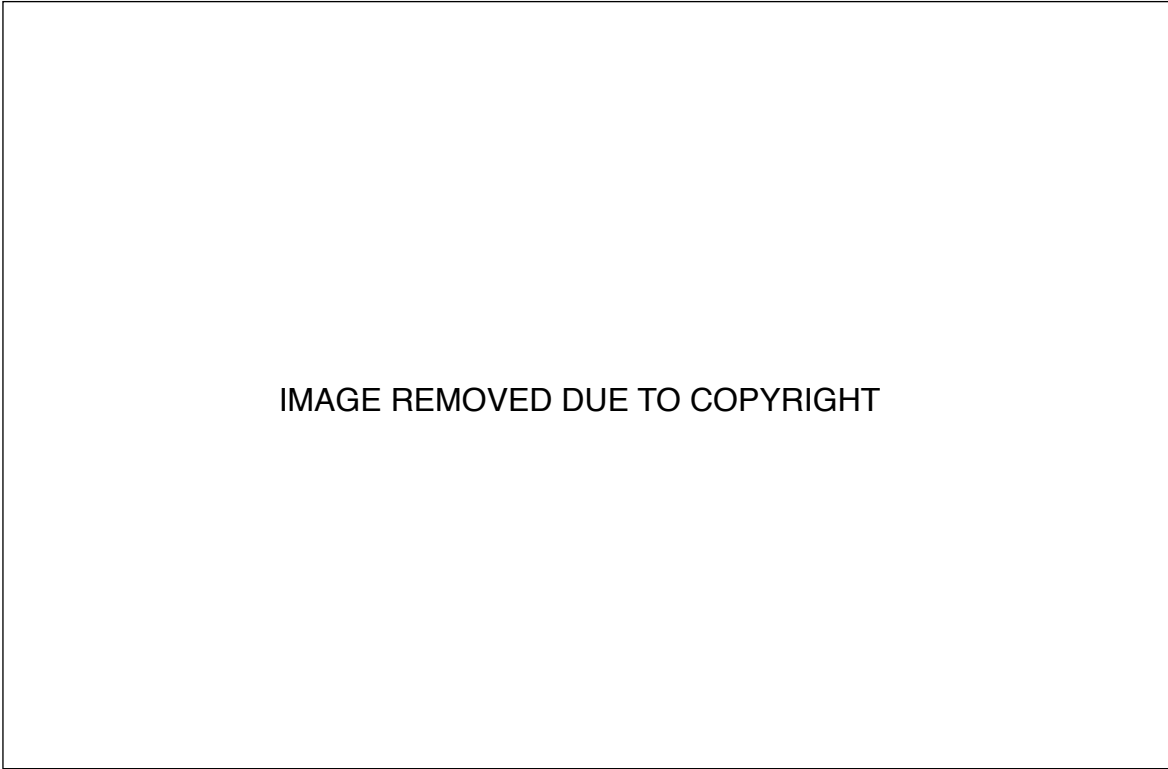


Figure 5. Closeup of figure 1: published photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois

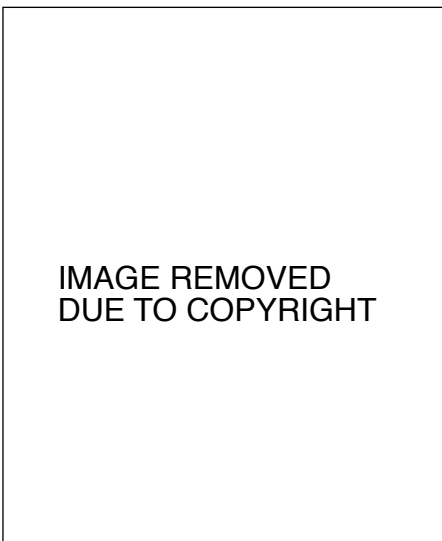


Figure 6. Closeup of figure 5: totem pole hanging outside of Pipsan's *Life* model home

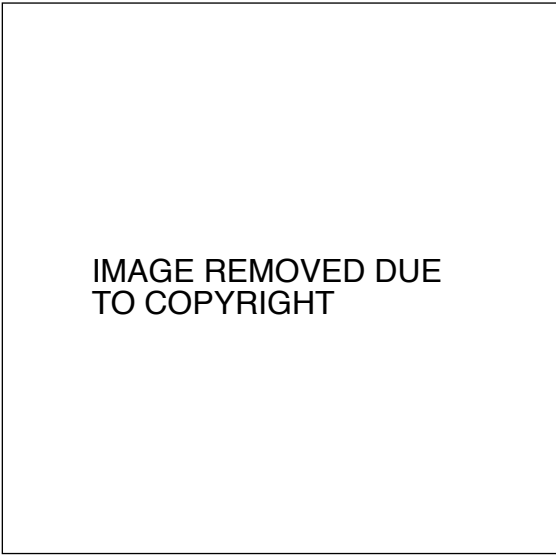


Figure 7. Painted pottery in unpublished photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

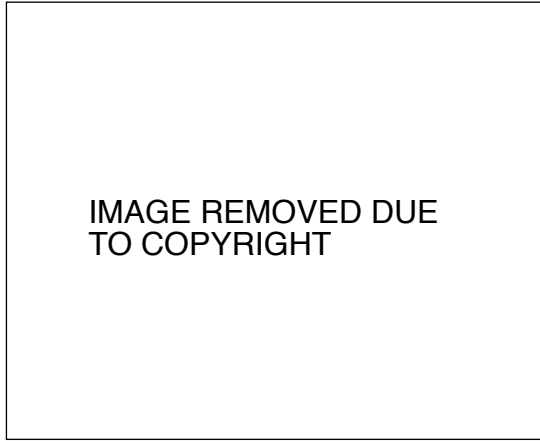


Figure 8. Painted pottery in unpublished photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

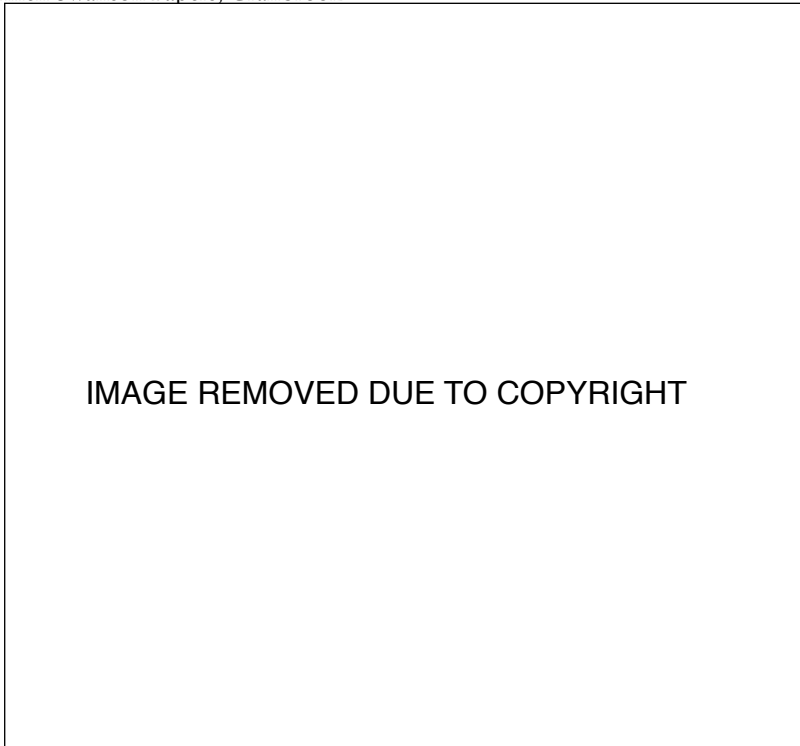


Figure 9. Painted pottery and indigenous-style pillow in unpublished photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 10. Painted pottery, totem pole, and rush rug styled with Sol-Air furniture, in the Swanson residence, ca. 1956, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 11. Floor drum (at far right) styled with Sol-Air rattan lounge chair, in the Swanson residence, ca. 1956, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)



IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 12. Model room, designed by Pipsan for Pittsburgh Paints advertisement (*Better Homes & Gardens*, Feb. 1958, 37). There is painted pottery in the corner and the same pillow that Pipsan used in her *Life* model home.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 13. Photograph of Pipsan, published in Pittsburgh Paints advertisement (*Better Homes & Gardens*, Feb. 1958, 37). The totem pole at right is the same one Pipsan used in her *Life* model home, pictured in figures 5 and 6, and her own home, pictured in figure 10.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 14. Unpublished photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

Figure 15. Unpublished photograph of Pipsan's *Life* model home, "Nordic Modern of the Midwest," displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois (J. Robert F. Swanson and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson Papers, Cranbrook Archives)

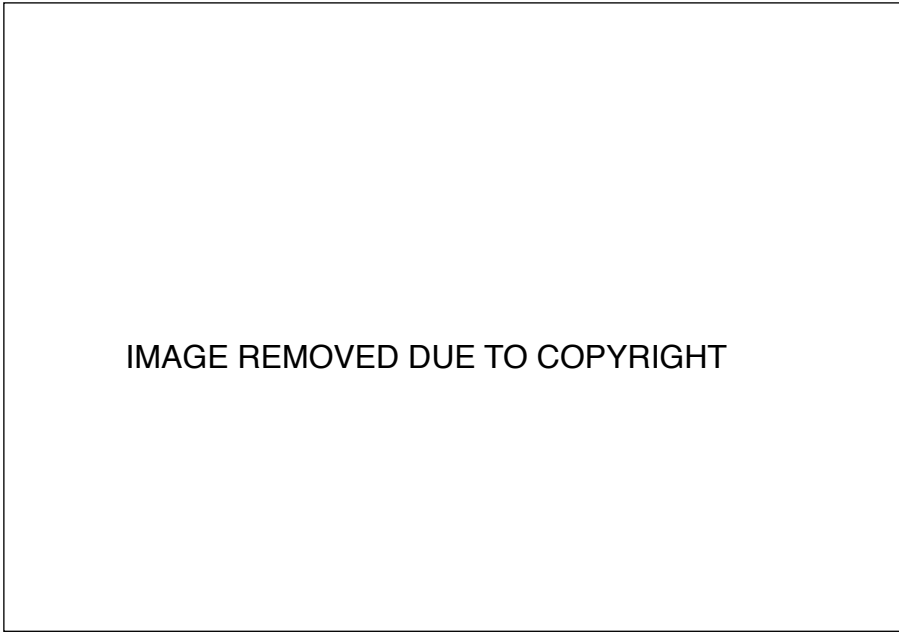


Figure 16. "Urbanity of the Northeast," regional model home displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois, photograph published in "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes" (*Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 118-19)

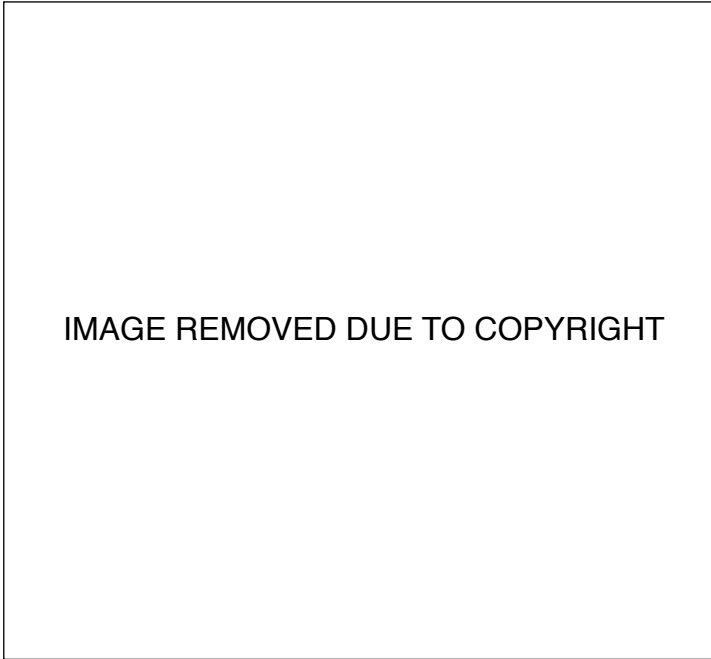


Figure 17. "The Elegance of the Old South," regional model home displayed at the *Look Homeward, America!* exhibition, Jan.-July 1955, Chicago Merchandise Mart, Illinois, photograph published in "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes" (*Life*, 21 Feb. 1955, 119)

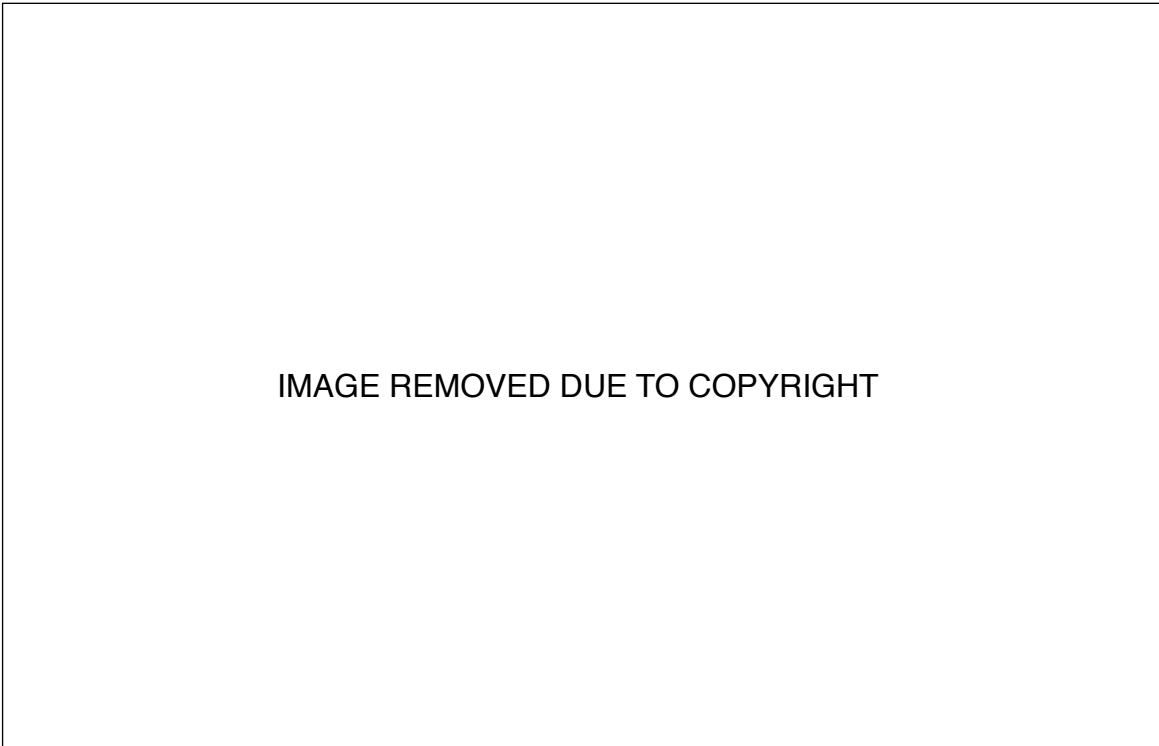


Figure 18. Villa Mairea interior, designed by Alvar Aalto and Aino Marsio-Aalto, Noormarkku, Finland, pictured in *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue, 1954 (*Design in Scandinavia*, 25)



Figure 19. Swedish interior pictured in *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue, 1954 (*Design in Scandinavia*, 22)



Figure 20. Norwegian (left) and Danish (right) printed textiles pictured in *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue, 1954 (*Design in Scandinavia*, 84)

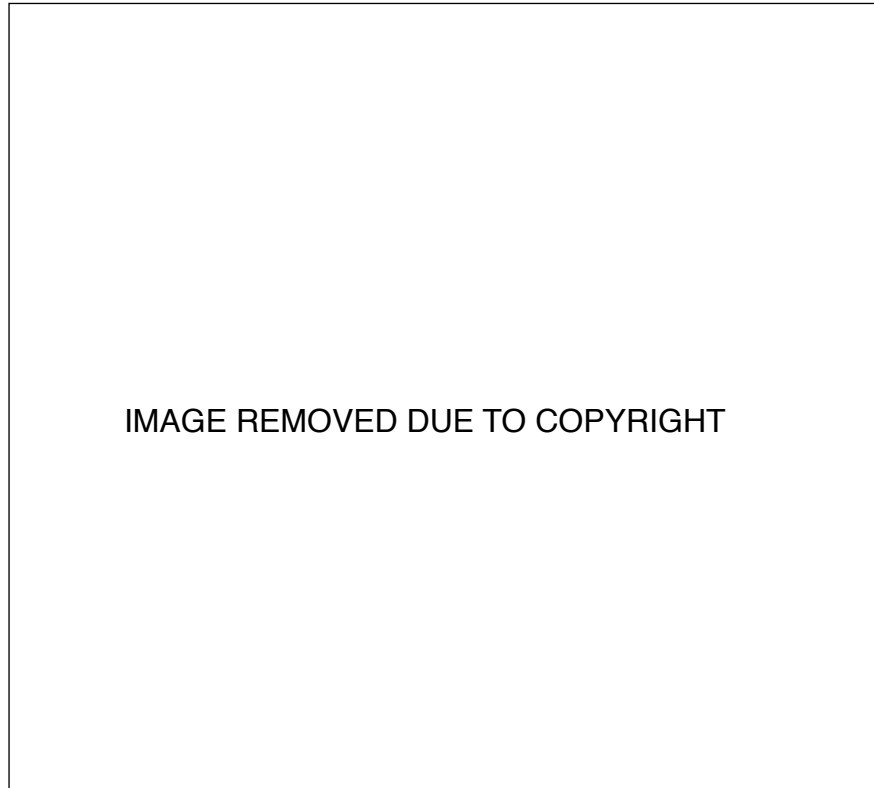


Figure 21. *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition installation, pictured in *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue, 1954 (*Design in Scandinavia*, 29)

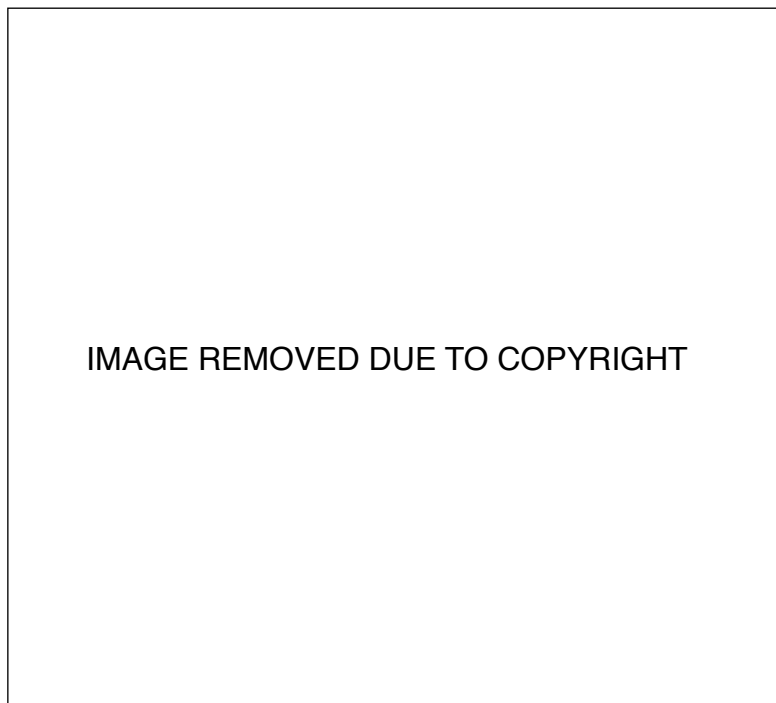


Figure 22. Furnishings manufactured by Nordiska Kompaniet, Stockholm, Sweden, pictured in *Design in Scandinavia* exhibition catalogue, 1954 (*Design in Scandinavia*, 83)

## Epilogue

Sol-Air was both the apex of Pipsan's career as a furniture designer as well as the last highly publicized or critically acclaimed line of furniture she designed. Thereafter, she may have worked on two other mass-produced furniture lines. In 1958, some pieces of lobby furniture, which Pipsan credited to Swanson Associates, were fabricated by Stow & Davis Furniture Co., a Grand Rapids manufacturer.<sup>1</sup> It is not known if they were one-offs or went into production. The pieces were pictured in the Pittsburgh Paint advertisement, discussed in chapter 8, in a model interior designed by Pipsan for the campaign.<sup>2</sup> In 1960, it appears that Pipsan was working with Johnson again to develop a new line, but there is no evidence that the line materialized.<sup>3</sup> Her work in mass-produced glassware, metalware, and lamp design had ended ten years earlier.

Into the 1970s, Pipsan continued to work in interior and mass-produced textiles design. She had begun designing printed drapery textiles for Edwin Raphael Company in 1952 and was still engaged by them in 1971. From 1957 to 1967, she was also retained by E. T. Barwick Mills in Chamblee, Georgia as a colour consultant and rug designer.<sup>4</sup> Her printed textiles were exhibited at the DIA in 1953 and at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York in 1956.<sup>5</sup> Two years later she exhibited a textile design at Expo '58, the Brussels World's Fair.<sup>6</sup> And in 1962, one of her area rugs won an outstanding design award from the AID.<sup>7</sup>

Pipsan had practiced textile and interior design longer than furniture, glassware, and lamp design. Perhaps textiles and interiors were the areas she was most comfortable in or enjoyed the

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<sup>1</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, SP.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Jr., interview by the author, 22 Feb. 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Pipsan to Mary Roche, Managing Editor, *House & Garden*, 5 Feb. 1960, box 9, folder 13, SP.

<sup>4</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, ca. 1971, box 9, folder 5, SP.

<sup>5</sup> *Regional Exhibition for Designer-Craftsmen U.S.A.* (Detroit: DIA, 1953), 15, CADC; Lloyd E. Herman to Roy Slade, 9 Aug. 1979, photocopies in Ashley Brown's papers, Cranbrook Archives. See also Appendix in this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; AID award certificate, 1961-1962, box 9, folder 7, SP.

most, and that is why she focused on them late in her career. It was probably also easier for her to get work in these fields since they continued to be gendered as female. Moreover, for her mass-produced textiles work in the 1950s to 1970s, she was employed by manufacturers to design for them. Manufacturing printed textiles and rugs was relatively straight-forward, and any technical obstacles that did arise would have been handled by Edwin Raphael and Barwick Mills.

Working in fields with significant female representation was probably also easier for her relationship with her husband. With Sol-Air, either Pipsan and/or Bob were not comfortable with her being solely credited for the furniture line. Bob was sensitive about receiving what he saw as proper credit for his work and he did not like feeling overshadowed by collaborators. Focusing on textiles and interiors might have granted Pipsan the best of both worlds. With her textile design work, the work was her own. Perhaps it was acceptable for her to receive recognition for textiles since Bob never tried his hand at such furnishings, whereas he had been interested in furniture and metalware design as of the mid-1930s. And with her interiors work, Pipsan was able to have a collaborative relationship with her husband in which she supported his work. Even though Bob was in charge of the architecture and Pipsan was in charge of interiors, she sometimes used the plural “we” to describe her interior design work, as if to reiterate that the work was not her own, but was rather part of a group effort and a larger project headed by Bob.<sup>8</sup> In 1969, she explained how she saw the relationship between interiors and architecture: “In order to get the best possible result of ‘Total Architecture,’ the Architect [*sic*] should not only design the exterior of the building but also have definite ideas regarding interiors; therefore the Interior Designer [*sic*] should be right on the spot to help carry the job through to the final solution. After all no one should know how the Architect [*sic*] thinks better than I; [*sic*] being not only the daughter and sister, but also the wife and

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<sup>8</sup> Pipsan, “Look Homeward, America” project statement, 1955, box 8, folder 11, SP; Pipsan to Ann Stacy, Executive Director, Michigan Society of Architects, 29 July 1969, box 7, folder 8, SP.



mother of outstanding Architects [*sic*].”<sup>9</sup> It is not known how long she held this view, but by this late date in her career she had come to the belief that interiors were secondary to architecture, and the interior designer was subservient to the architect.

For many years, Pipsan continued her crusade to promote Bob’s accomplishments and redress the record of his contributions to Saarinen architectural projects from the late 1930s and 1940s. In 1956, after an article on Eero was published in *Time* magazine (with his face on the cover), Pipsan wrote a “Letter to the Editor,” which the magazine published, to clarify that Bob and Eliel were involved in two of the projects discussed in the article as Eero’s work.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1970s, when Eliel’s biographer Albert Christ-Janer was in the process of preparing a revised edition of his monograph, Pipsan wrote to him to ask that Bob be given more recognition in it, as she felt that he had been “robbed” of credit in the first edition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pipsan to Stacy.

<sup>10</sup> Pipsan, “Letters,” *Time*, 23 July 1956. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601560723,00.html>

<sup>11</sup> Pipsan to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel’s biographer, 18 Jan. 1971, CJP; Bob to Albert Christ-Janer, Eliel’s biographer, 25 April 1972, CJP.

## Conclusion

Pipsan first began working as an interior decorator to address Bob's need in his architectural practice, and this eventually led her to design mass-produced furnishings. Before she arrived at mass-production design, Pipsan established a business in order to buy furnishings from manufacturers. Once she had access to the wholesale market, she found few offerings that fitted her vision of modern interiors. She therefore commissioned custom furnishings from local craftspeople if the client could afford it, and she also asked manufacturers to make customized versions of catalogue items as well as custom-made pieces. The rejection and limitations she encountered in procuring furnishings this way segued into co-designing entire lines of mass-produced furnishings. Pipsan's early interior decorating work pressed her towards mass-production design. Bob's entrepreneurial nature and his financial constraints also directed their careers early on towards potentially lucrative work. Engaging in mass-production design provided the Swansons with additional sources of income besides architectural and interiors work.

Much of Pipsan's training to design mass-produced furnishings came through working as an interior decorator. By sourcing catalogue furnishings for clients and requesting custom and customized furnishings from manufacturers, she developed a network of industry connections, an understanding of production methods, and knowledge of offerings on the market. The similarities between Pipsan's own designs for mass-produced furnishings and furnishings she previously purchased or commissioned for her interiors demonstrates her long-term commitment to her design aesthetic. She was interested in certain established types of modern furnishings—custom-fit wood furniture, printed textiles on “natural” grounds, transparent glassware in undulating forms, rattan and metal lamps, metal and sling furniture. Products of these types that she used in her earlier interiors were probably the closest she could find to what she sought. When she was sourcing

furnishings for clients, she likely developed opinions about the products she found and imagined ways she would alter them to better suit her aesthetic. By starting with a product type she was familiar with and was already successfully mass-produced, and by altering it or refining it, rather than starting from scratch and inventing a radical design or using experimental materials, she was working within the realm of possibilities for mass-produced furnishings. Designing in this manner was a great way for her, someone lacking formal training or relevant experience in mass-production design, to get her feet wet in various areas.

Some of Pipsan's training to work in mass-produced furnishings came years before she began working as an interior decorator. As an adolescent in Finland, she first designed repeat patterns, worked with textiles, and made metalware. In part, Pipsan learned to design by emulating the work of her father, mother, and Wiener Werkstätte designers; the way she later designed mass-produced furnishings was similarly emulative. Her informal home training combined with her formal education in metals, weaving, fabric design, and ceramics exposed her to many materials and areas of furnishings design. After moving to the United States, she designed and made soft furnishings with her mother for their home, and shortly thereafter, she began contributing repeat patterns, surface decorations, and textiles to interiors projects headed by Eliel. This early work helped prepare her to work as interior designer in her own right. Most of her early training, however, primed her to work in areas with relatively large female representation.

Flexible Home Arrangements, the Saarinen-Swanson Group, and Sol-Air all grew out of Pipsan's needs for her interior design work, and each line involved Pipsan working in areas of mass-produced furnishings design with little female representation. Pipsan was able to become a designer of mass-produced furniture, glassware, lamps, and metalware not by getting hired into a freelance or staff designer position, but by initiating the lines herself with one or more male partners. Pipsan and her co-designers conceived of the lines and convinced manufacturers and/or distributors to make,

market, and sell their designs. Pipsan and Bob at times also coordinated the projects and were involved in fabrication and marketing.

Pipsan had an ambivalent relationship with her association with her father and their family name. Her first foray into mass-production design, Flexible Home Arrangements, was done in partnership with Eliel, and the line demonstrated his stylistic influence. He also contributed experience, ability, and probably connections, and his well-known name was used to market the line. Around the same time the line came out, Pipsan incorporated the Saarinen name into her public identity as an interior designer who also designed interior furnishings. Her decision to start going by Pipsan *Saarinen* Swanson was an effort to legitimize her image, garner respect for her work, and, most likely, to gain public recognition for her work in male-dominated furniture design, which she was initially denied in the publicity on Flexible Home Arrangements. With the Saarinen-Swanson Group, although Pipsan and Bob departed from Eliel's stylistic influence and worked on the project independently of him, Eliel's reputation still provided a foundation for the line's brand identity, which framed the furnishings as a fulfilment of Cranbrook's original Arts and Crafts mission, largely spearheaded and made renowned by Eliel. The brand identity of Sol-Air, on the other hand, did not associate the products with Eliel in any way, and for this line Pipsan headed the design and was initially portrayed publicly as the line's sole designer. She had come a long way in terms of public visibility, from Eliel's barely credited subordinate ten years earlier. But, her father's reputation continued to follow her, with some press on Sol-Air pointing out that Pipsan was Eliel's daughter. Eliel had initially helped Pipsan gain entry to mass-production design, but thereafter it was difficult for her to leave her father's reputation and maiden name behind. By 1950, Pipsan expressed resentment towards an association with him and the other Saarinens. Surely Pipsan was aware of the opportunities and recognition her family name had provided her with, yet she also felt that it obscured the true merit of her and Bob's work and concealed their accomplishments.

Pipsan, Bob, and Eliel all knew the value of public credit. Eliel learned this early in his career when he worked on the Finland Pavilion for the 1900 Paris Exposition. While he designed the pavilion in collaboration with other architects, artists, and craftspeople, the Paris and international press portrayed him as the main designer, bolstering his reputation at home and bringing him international renown.<sup>1</sup> Although the details of much of Pipsan's collaborative work cannot be known, analysing the way credit was assigned publicly and how the credit lines sometimes shifted over time, alongside how the designers themselves assigned and discussed credit, grants insight into the personal-work dynamics of the collaborations and the reasons Pipsan was publicly visible or not. When Pipsan worked in partnership with a man who had a high public profile (i.e., Eliel), he overshadowed her in the publicity—her contribution was not even mentioned in the press on Flexible Home Arrangements. Some unknown measure was taken to get Pipsan's name included in the W. & J. Sloane booklet. On the other hand, when she worked in partnership with her husband, who did not have a large national reputation, critics and the design world readily credited Pipsan. Her role was clear in the marketing and press on the Saarinen-Swanson Group and matched how she herself described the collaboration. With Sol-Air, she was eventually overshadowed by her male partners, because of efforts by Pipsan and/or Bob to bring Bob and Bob Jr. more into the spotlight. Pipsan shared opportunities to publicize her work as an independent designer with her husband and otherwise continuously worked to uplift him in the public eye, sometimes at the expense of recognition for herself. Time and again Pipsan demonstrated that credit mattered to her, but she was concerned with the credit of her and Bob's collaborative work, the family office, and Bob's architectural contributions to Saarinen projects. There is no record of Pipsan expressing discontent that she alone was denied proper credit.

When Pipsan's interior design work developed into lines of products aimed at national

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<sup>1</sup> Hausen, "Architecture of Eliel Saarinen," 10, 32-33.

audiences, there is no evidence that she altered her style. For most of her mass-produced furnishing designs, close precedents existed in her earlier interior designs. She appears to have assumed that her interior design style would have a wide enough appeal to succeed on the market. To turn designs born out of the needs and wants of a single client into products that spoke to large groups of people, the style of the furnishings did not change dramatically. Those responsible for marketing the mass-produced furnishings had to ensure that Pipsan's and her co-designers' furnishing designs were presented to the public in a manner that was intelligible and enticing to a national audience. Brand identities were therefore devised for the furnishing lines to make them appeal to as many people as possible. Each brand identity spoke to specific social, political, cultural, and economic conditions in the United States at the time the products were released.

Yet, the disparity between Pipsan's interiors and the brand identities varied from line to line. When Pipsan embarked in mass-production design, modern design did not have a large following in the United States, and many consumers had to be convinced of the merits of Pipsan's designs. The identity of Flexible Home Arrangements differed dramatically from Pipsan's modern interiors for which the line was conceived, which had clear ties to the work of celebrated Finnish modernist designers. Marketing and press material for the line, on the other hand, portrayed the furniture as in harmony with traditional American decorating styles, rooted in the American past, and attuned to the American present. After the line was released and over the course of the next decade, modern design increased in popularity among American consumers. Paralleling this increase in sales was a decrease in the disparity between Pipsan's interiors and the brand identities for furnishing lines inspired by her interiors. The identity of the Saarinen-Swanson Group extrapolated on Pipsan's previous interiors, in which she combined craft- and industrial-looking elements. Marketing and press material on the line presented a narrative about the happy union between the hand and machine with allusions to the Arts and Crafts Movement. The brand identity of Sol-Air closely

reflected how Pipsan used the products in her interiors; both the marketing and her interiors included exotic references as well as associations with science, technology, and nature. Pipsan discussed Sol-Air as if she simply designed it as she and her family wanted it for their own home, showed it to buyers on a whim, and it immediately sold well. Because Pipsan's interior design style had gained a following in the post-war period, and because modern outdoor and porch furniture had long been more popular than other types of modern furniture, her furnishing designs did not have to be reframed, or even elaborated on much, to appeal to a large audience.

However, the mediation of Sol-Air did not stop with the marketing. When *Life* published Pipsan's model home decorated with Sol-Air, the magazine reframed her work as "Nordic Modern of the Midwest." In 1940, when Flexible Home Arrangements was branded, Pipsan's and her co-designers' Nordic heritage was not deemed marketable. By the mid-1950s, however, it was, in large part because in recent years Scandinavian design had proved itself to be a particularly popular variant of modern design among the American public. In 1955, Pipsan's Scandinavian heritage was a talking point for her furnishing and interior designs, but only insofar as it could serve a narrative that ultimately promoted American modern design.

Marketers featured and promoted designers' identities when they promised to add value to the products and help convince consumers to purchase them. For Flexible Home Arrangements and Sol-Air, marketing and press associated the furniture with architects to assure consumers that the furniture was rationally designed and functional. The Saarinen-Swanson Group marketing and press framed the line's designers as artists with handcraft skills in order to persuade consumers that the products were high quality, anti-commercialist, and pro-individualist. None of the brand identities relied on Pipsan's expertise and status as an interior designer. Evidently, the marketers and other mediators did not believe that qualities widely associated with interior designers would add value to the product lines commensurate to the image of architects, artists, or craftspeople. The figure of the

interior designer (or interior decorator) had not established a reputation that could be relied on to convince consumers of the value of products they designed. Even for the *Life* model home project, which featured the work of top interior decorators from around the country, the magazine did not celebrate the specialized knowledge and skills of the decorators whose work the magazine featured.

The throughline in Pipsan's career was her interior design work. She practiced interior design consistently, from 1929 until the day she died. For the period considered in this thesis, there are only two gaps in her interior design resume: a few years in the early 1930s when she pursued custom dressmaking and after World War II when she was developing the Saarinen-Swanson Group. Over the first decade she worked for pay as a designer, there was a slight gender shift in the work she undertook. In the early 1930s, Pipsan worked firmly in design areas associated with women: dressmaking, two-dimensional surface decoration, textiles, and colour palettes, alongside her interior decorating work. By the end of the decade, she had abandoned working for pay as dressmaker, and was pursuing mass-produced furniture design. In effect, she swapped a feminine activity for a masculine one. She soon dissociated from the more feminine term "interior decorator." In the following decade, she entered more areas with little female representation. Yet, at no point in Pipsan's career did she abandon or reject design areas associated with women. Consistently working in interior design anchored her career in a field that was considered appropriate for women. Pipsan's forays into mass-produced furnishings design branched off her interior design work and pointed back to it. The work fed back into her interiors work by allowing her to better execute her interiors at a lower cost than custom-made alternatives, and the lines bolstered the Swansons' reputations outside Michigan, thereby helping them secure more local architectural-interiors work. Moreover, Pipsan's work in male-dominated furnishing fields was still grounded in the domestic sphere because the products were marketed for use in consumer's homes.

In Pipsan's few statements, she discussed her career development as if she were compelled



down various paths. She began designing interiors in 1929 because there was no decorator in Detroit who worked in a modern style to provide interiors for Bob's architecture. Flexible Home Arrangements and the Saarinen-Swanson Group both addressed holes in the market so that Pipsan could better execute interiors for Bob's buildings. She headed the design of Sol-Air because the furniture she wanted for her family's home, designed by Bob, did not exist on the market. Discussing her career in this manner, she did not acknowledge that she was driven in any way by her own personal pleasure, ambition, or fulfilment; rather, she became an interior decorator and then a furniture, glassware, metalware, lamp, and printed textile designer because there was a need, and someone had to do it.

## Appendix:

### Pipsan Saarinen Swanson: Life and Work, 1905-1979<sup>1</sup>

1905, March 31	born in Kirkkonummi, Finland
1921-1923	takes classes in weaving, fabric design, ceramics, and metalworking classes at the Atheneum Art School and the University of Helsinki, Finland
1923, April	with Loja and Eero, travels to United States to join Eliel
1925	with the Saarinen family, moves to Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
1926, May 8	marries Bob in Toledo, Ohio
ca. 1927	designs ceiling decorations for academic building of Cranbrook School for boys
1928, Aug. 18	gives birth to first child, Robert Saarinen Swanson
1929	exhibits textile wall covering design at MMA exhibition <i>The Architect and the Industrial Arts</i>
1929	establishes interior decorating department in Bob's architecture office
1929-1930	designs automobile interiors for Packard Motor Car Company
ca. 1931	contributes to interior design of Kingswood School Cranbrook
1931	serves as colour advisor for Truscon Paint Company and Hamtramck public schools
1932	exhibits dress designs at Kingswood School Cranbrook
1932	maintains batik studio and serves as Resident Artist and Craftsman in Costume Design at Cranbrook
1932-1936	advertises classes in batik, costume, interior, and furnishings design at Cranbrook
1933	hosts runway show of fashion designs at Cranbrook
1933-1934	maintains interior and dress design studio at Cranbrook
1934	exhibits dress design at MMA exhibition <i>Contemporary American Industrial Art</i>
1935	exhibits dress design and model living room (with Bob) at Cranbrook <i>Exhibition of Home Furnishings</i>
1936	exhibits work at Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences in Virginia <sup>2</sup>
1937	exhibits rug design at MMA exhibition <i>Rugs and Carpets</i>
1938	exhibits rug and tablecloth design at Toledo Museum of Art exhibition <i>Contemporary Decorative Art</i>
1939, Oct. 12	gives birth to second child, Ronald Saarinen Swanson
1940, June	with Eliel and Bob, introduces Flexible Home Arrangements

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<sup>1</sup> Citations are included for events not discussed in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> "Arts and Crafts by the Saarinens Will be on Display in Norfolk," *Portsmouth Star* (VA), 2 Feb. 1936, newspaper clipping in Loja Saarinen's scrapbook no. 1, 39, ESC.

- 1940 with Bob, awarded Honorable Mention by Detroit chapter of AIA for design of Koebel residence (Grosse Pointe, Michigan)<sup>3</sup>
- 1944-1947 partner in Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen architecture firm, in charge of interior design<sup>4</sup>
- 1947, June with Bob, Marianne Strengell, Ben Baldwin, Charles Dusenbury, and Lydia Winston, introduces Saarinen-Swanson Group
- 1947 with Bob, forms Swanson Associates
- 1947 awarded Honorable Mention for twin bed lamp design and printed textile design from AID best designs of the year
- 1948 awarded Honorable Mention for candelabrum design from AID best designs of the year
- 1948-1950 designs glassware for United States Glass Company in Tiffin, Ohio
- 1949, Sept.-Nov. exhibits glass vase design at DIA *Exhibition for Modern Living*
- 1949, Nov.-Jan. exhibits glass vase design at MoMA exhibition *Design Show: Christmas 1949*
- 1950, Jan.-1955 with Bob and Bob Jr., introduces Sol-Air
- 1950 May-Oct. exhibits Sol-Air furniture at MoMA *Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House*
- 1950-1951 Nov.-Jan. exhibits Sol-Air lounge chair at MoMA *Good Design* exhibition
- 1951 with Bob, wins AASA-AIA (American Association of School Administrators and American Institute of Architects) award for design of Torry Elementary School (Birmingham, Michigan)<sup>5</sup>
- 1952-at least 1971 designs screen-printed textiles for Edwin Raphael Company in Holland, Michigan
- 1953 exhibits two printed textile designs at DIA *Regional Exhibition for Designer-Craftsmen U.S.A.*
- 1955 designs model home for *Life* magazine article "Cross-Country Roundup of U.S. Homes" and related Chicago Merchandise Mart exhibition *Look Homeward, America!*
- 1956 wins Honorable Mention for Outstanding Achievement in Custom Furniture Design Award for storage room divider exhibited at Museum of Science and Industry *Hardwoods Industry Exhibit* in Chicago, Illinois<sup>6</sup>
- 1956 exhibits two printed textile designs at Museum of Contemporary Crafts exhibition *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*
- 1957 wins Louise Bolender award from Home Fashions League for outstanding contribution to home furnishings industry in the Midwest<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Architect Awards Listed at Exhibit," *Detroit Free Press*, 3 Oct. 1940.

<sup>4</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, ca. 1948, box 8, folder 11, Swanson Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Pipsan curriculum vitae, 17 Oct. 1969, box 8, folder 11, Swanson Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Photograph, 1956, box 9, folder 5, SP; Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; Fine Hardwoods Association award, 1956, box 9, folder 11, SP.

<sup>7</sup> Pipsan CV, 17 Oct. 1969; "Wins Design Award," *Detroit News*, 18 Jan. 1957.

1957-1967 serves as colour consultant and rug designer for E.T. Barwick Mills of Chamblee, Georgia

1958 designs “Dream” room for Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company National Advertising campaign

1958 exhibits textile design at Expo 58, the Brussels World’s Fair

1962 wins outstanding design award from AID for an area rug submitted to the 1961-62 V’Soske Rug Design Competition

1971 awarded honorary membership from AIA<sup>8</sup>

1979, Oct. 23 dies in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

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<sup>8</sup> American Institute of Architects press release, 4 April 1971, box 9, folder 5, SP.

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