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*On the cover* Chrome plated metal and leather "Palo Alto" chair by Byron Botker shown at CD11 1971 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Landes Manufacturing Company)

*This page, top to bottom* Bottles by Gertrud and Otto Natzler against batik hanging by Carol Ryoko Funai (CD10, 44.1.5, California Design Collection, Oakland Museum of California); Carlo Mollino Roll Top Desk, 1950 (James A. Michener Art Museum); Detail of Harris Strong plate (Leslie Piña)



# RIDING THE

## The California Design Exhibitions 1955-1976

By Jo Lauria

All photographs courtesy California Design Collection, Oakland Museum of California

The California Design exhibitions burst onto the scene in 1955 like a fantastical chimera, breathing fire and vitality into the design forum. Thirteen exhibitions, eventually spanning 21 years, they embraced varied ideologies and a visionary approach. Crafted one-of-a-kind objects were shown alongside industrial design prototypes and manufactured goods, all displayed in a non-hierarchical manner. The public was treated to a daring kaleidoscope of design, from hand-thrown pottery, plastic dinnerware and manufactured fiberglass furniture to unconventional jewelry, holistic "environments," a Desert Rat vehicle (precursor to today's SUVs) and a two-seater gyroplane.

The exhibitions, held originally at the Pasadena Art Museum and later at other venues, displayed the most promising designs of each preceding year (or years, after the exhibitions

became triennials in the 1960s). They served as a showcase for the radically new. After World War II, when innovations in lightweight metals, molded plywood, reinforced concrete, plastics and resins revolutionized the design vocabulary California designers took full advantage. Concurrently, a burgeoning craft movement expanded traditional creative expression to include the vanguard, the funky and the monumental. The California Design exhibitions were frequently the first venue to preview wonderfully imaginative mass-produced and one-of-a-kind objects reflective of both these trends, designed and made in California.



Dramatic interior settings were a hallmark of the California Design exhibitions. Seen here: designer/craftsman Espenet's (Art Carpenter) laminated walnut Rib Chair (see also opposite); Sculptron 106 do-it-yourself sculpture by Charles F. Ulrich; Geodesic dymaxion light fixture, invented by Buckminster Fuller, manufactured by Xavier Lanier; Nested rosewood end tables by John Caldwell for Brown Saltman Company (CD10, 44,1,2)

# WAVE



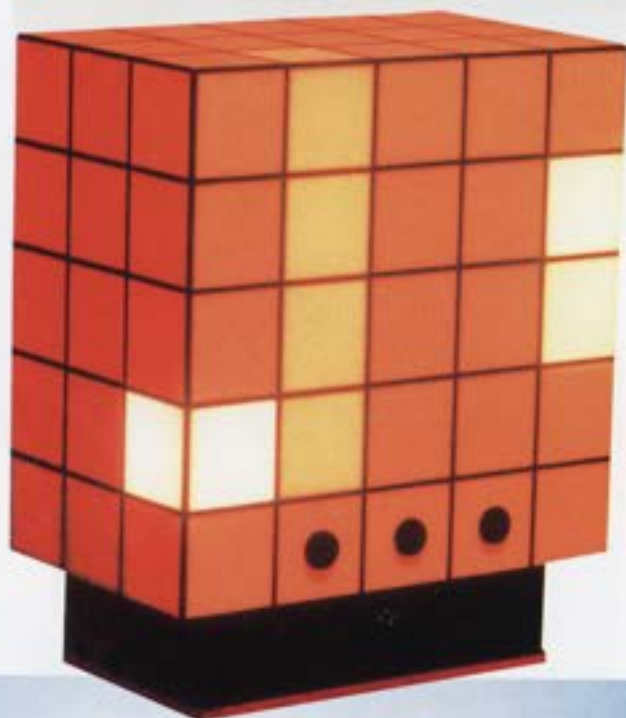
**Seen here for the first time in almost 30 years:  
original photographs from the seminal  
California Design Exhibitions**



# RIDING



**"...Western culture is showing accelerated symptoms of national trends...Westerners, particularly along the Pacific Coast, are pioneering busily in advance of the national culture."  
Neil Morgan, *Westward Tilt*, 1965**



Why the vitality of design here at that time? "The war was a great design breeder" says Eudorah M. Moore, who directed all the California Design exhibitions from 1962 onward. "The displacement of people; people returning or deciding to change their places of abode, or their directions; the development of new materials to experiment with; the existence of the G.I. Bill. All gave major impetus to a new attitude and movement."

### **Outdoors and on the go**

Several overarching tendencies emerged from these benchmark exhibitions, defining California design as a unique entity born of place as well as time. The famous informality and casualness of the California lifestyle, coupled with the temperate climate and love of outdoor living, was frequently celebrated in furnishings intended to withstand the elements. Wes Williams lounge chair and ottoman of enameled steel tubing, inset with removable, reversible slings of rattan (California Design 8, 1962) combined high-tech factory materials with the hand-woven look of a South Seas hut. The cozy, compact rattan and formed plywood bed by Danny Ho Fong for Tropi-Cal (CD10, 1968) allowed one to recline on a suspended platform while ensconced in contiguous walls and ceiling of woven rattan.

*Opposite* The unsinkable "Yak-Yak" canoe, designed by Howard Benjamin for Fleet Products Co. and fiberglass sailboat by John Redfield, manufactured by Accurate Systems (CD10, 44,4,6). *This page, top to bottom* Baked enamel steel frame chaise prototype by Jeanne Garman Allee and Kenneth R. Spotts (CD10, 44,1,8); Electronic cybernetic clock by Arnold Forsman (CD10, 44,4,6); Cast aluminum and glass table by Thomas P. Lynn (CD10, 44,4,2)







The passion for outdoor living produced numerous accessories for patio and garden, like the massive ceramic sand urns and planters by Architectural Pottery (CD9, 1965) in indigenous colors derived from the state's lemon and orange groves and avocado orchards.

The California craftsperson/designer's ingenuity and free-spirited approach toward new materials and technology fed an impulse to stretch the boundaries of utility and create furniture that also functioned as sculpture. A prototype chair by Jerry Johnson (CD8) combined traditional walnut with gleaming cast aluminum in a laminated sandwich that paid homage to Art Nouveau while appearing fluidly ultra-modern. Paul Tuttle's elegant "Z" chair of steel and leather (CD9) expanded on the dynamics of Gerrit Rietveld's "Zig Zag" Chair of laminated wood, but exploited the tensile strength of steel to create airy negative space in place of Rietveld's bulky joined wood planes.

Many entries capitalized on newly available molded fiberglass and acrylic, which were multi-functional, weatherproof, virtually indestructible, lightweight, comfortable, hygienic, and available in a wide range of colors. These objects—biomorphic, sensuous and progressive in appearance—included a bus stop bench in covered fiberglass by Douglas Deeds for Architectural Fiberglass, displayed along with fiberglass planter and seat by Elsie Crawford for the same manufacturer and Wayne Compton and Associates ellipsoid acrylic street lamps on a white sculptured pole, manufactured by Kim Lighting, Inc. (all CD10)





A radical showcase for new forms, new materials, new ideas



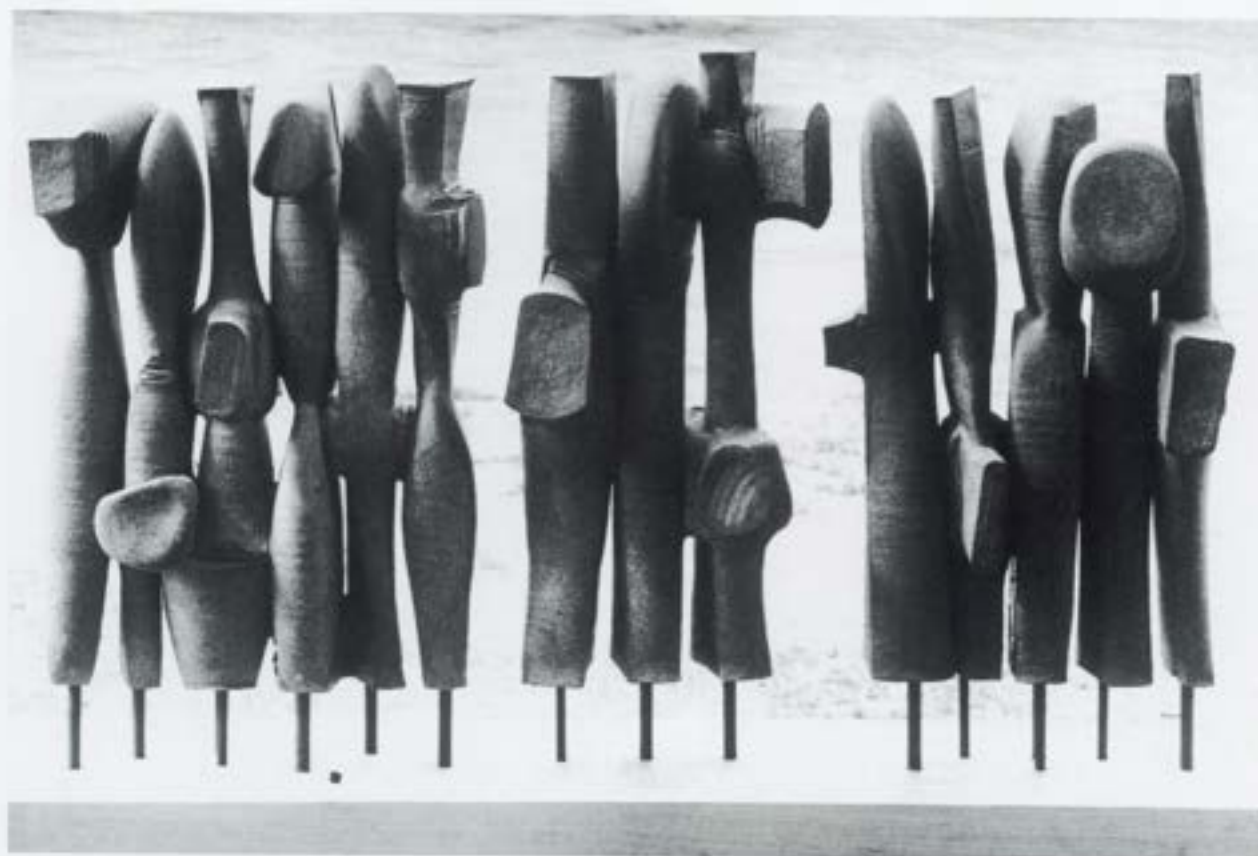
The 1968 California Design 10 exhibition also featured fiberglass chairs and table-ottomans designed by Douglas Deeds and manufactured by Architectural Pottery/Architectural Fiberglass Co., described as "seamless forms that rise monolithically, without joints, connectors or change of materials to create highly comfortable, easily maintained and practically indestructible seating for homes, hotels or offices" and a prototype fiberglass chair by Don Chadwick, later to be manufactured by Knoll Associates—sculptural in form, engaging from all angles, womb-like, and inviting—which continued the construct of Verner Panton's injection-molded single-piece chair of 1960-67

*Opposite, top to bottom* Glazed ceramic forms by designer/craftsman Jun Kaneko (CD10, 44,4,5); Tile designed by Eszter Haraszty, manufactured by Stonelight Tile Co. (CD10, 44,4,8); Armless lounge chair by Maurice Martine, in aluminum, laminated rosewood and cane, meticulously assembled with aircraft bolts (CD10, 44,4,3)  
*This page, top to bottom* Eugene Bielowski's ear jewelry (CD10); Hand-hooked textile by Gere Kavanaugh (CD9, 44,1 1)





**Each exhibition contained over 750 objects, displayed in 12,000 square feet of space at the Pasadena Art Museum**



Thomas P Lynn's sculptured aluminum table with candelabra (CD10) formally challenged the notion that a table can only serve one function. Handmade, hand finished, and designed by a single artisan, it is at once a useful piece of domestic furniture and an art object.

The pursuit of sport and leisure activities was prominently addressed, from the "Sky Skooter" two-seater gyroplane for daring amateur aviators, designed and manufactured by Herman A. Saalfeld (CD8) to Cole Williams "Desert Rat" vehicle (CD8) for "mobility in sand, snow, and usually impassable areas" and the Yak Yak canoe (CD 10) of molded plastic for the Fleet Products Co., displayed with a sailboat of fiberglass and polyurethane foam.

California's fabled on-the-go, do-it-yourself individualism found expression in a mobile, collapsible cabana with woven rattan roof by Danny Ho Fong for Tropi-Cal (CD8) a prototype "M Bend" frame for chair ottoman or table by Judith Wachsman, shipped flat in component parts (CD11 1971) an expandable, interchangeable furniture system of pre-cut wood lengths based on a patented "lock key" component for easy

*Opposite* Architectural Pottery's ceramic sand urns and planters, the two on right designed by Marilyn Kay Austin (CD9, 44,5,5)

*This page, top to bottom* David Cressey sculpture (CD8-157), Photo: Richard Gross; Sand-cast aluminum gate, 5'x7' by Gene Thompson (CD10, 44,4,5)



California's fabled individualism, affinity for the outdoors, and hippie culture helped form the state's creative identity



Hippie culture made itself felt after CD 10 of 1968 in such offerings as "Spice Flower" wallpaper by Gere Kavanaugh and "Geraniums" tapestry designed by weaver Paul Avignon and produced at Aubusson factories. Their "flower power" iconography meshed with the social message of the time. Arline Fisch's gold and silver fiber knitted "pectoral jewelry" (CD76) with linked silver plates, cleverly covered the breasts in a modest antidote to bare-breasted fashion popularized by style guru Rudi Gernreich in the 1960s. Victoria Mourneau's flowing fiber sculpture in shades of velvet (CD76) served as a sumptuous, hunker-down comfort seat for a high-style crash pad. Jack R. Hopkins' "Womb Room" (CD11) was an environment of sculpted furniture to ensconce the suburban denizen demanding total separation from external surroundings. "Dining Environment" (CD11) a surround of woven cotton, linen and nylon fabricated by Gerhard Knodel, and "Arizona Inner Space" (CD11) by

*Opposite, top left* Ceramic monolith by Jerry Rothman (CD10, 44,1,5) *Below* Fiberglass furniture by Design Line Products (CD10, 44,1,6) *This page, top left* Glass elements by Angelo Mangiarotti, assembled by William Gruen of Gruen Lighting (CD10, 44,1,6) *Right* Tom Tramel's table of East Indian rosewood and ebony with segmented top (CD10, 44,1 7)





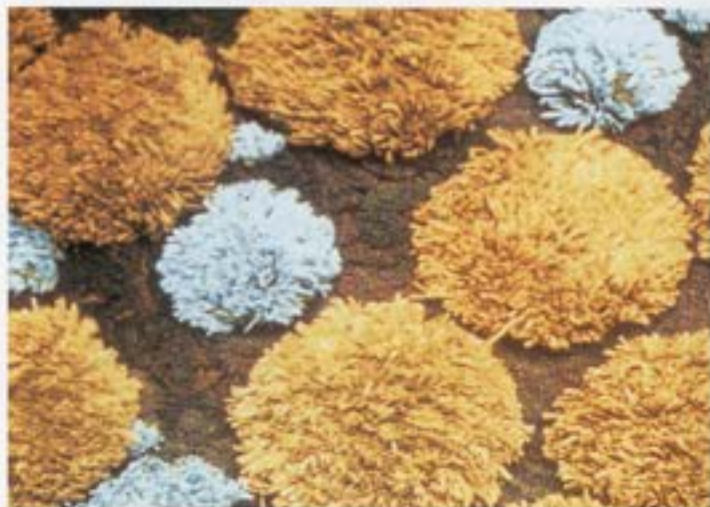
Barbara Shawcroft, of knotless netting jute "conceived as a constantly growing, ever-changing organic space," invited their occupants to cozy up in a tactile, soothing, contemplative environment apart from the hard-edged everyday world.

### How it all came about

These are just a smattering of the thousands of displays in the California Design program, which produced eight annual exhibitions from 1955 to 1962; three triennials, in 1965, 1968 and 1971 and two theme-based exhibitions, California Design 1910 in 1974 and California Design '76.

To Gerhardt Knodel, currently the director of Michigan's Cranbrook Academy of Art and a past artist-participant in the shows, the California Design exhibitions were "a portrayal of... a California that for many people existed and still exists as a desirable state of mind, a place for living one's dreams." According to Bernard Kester exhibiting artist and installation designer for several of the California Design shows, the exhibitions were "a kind of modern boosterism for California's artists and designers. they demonstrated California's leadership, while celebrating quality and adventuresome design." For Sam Maloof, renowned furniture maker and exhibitor in twelve of the thirteen California Design shows, the exhibitions "raised the bar on understanding and interpreting crafts, which were seen in a whole new light."

These exhibitions were "the only game in town, the only place where people in the design world could exhibit their





## The California Design exhibitions 'raised the bar on understanding crafts,' says Sam Maloof



work," points out Lois Boardman, exhibiting artist and later director of exhibitions. Boardman had the foresight to preserve the California Design archives, including all the original photography. She stored them in her basement for over twenty years before donating them to the Oakland Museum of California in the late 1990s.

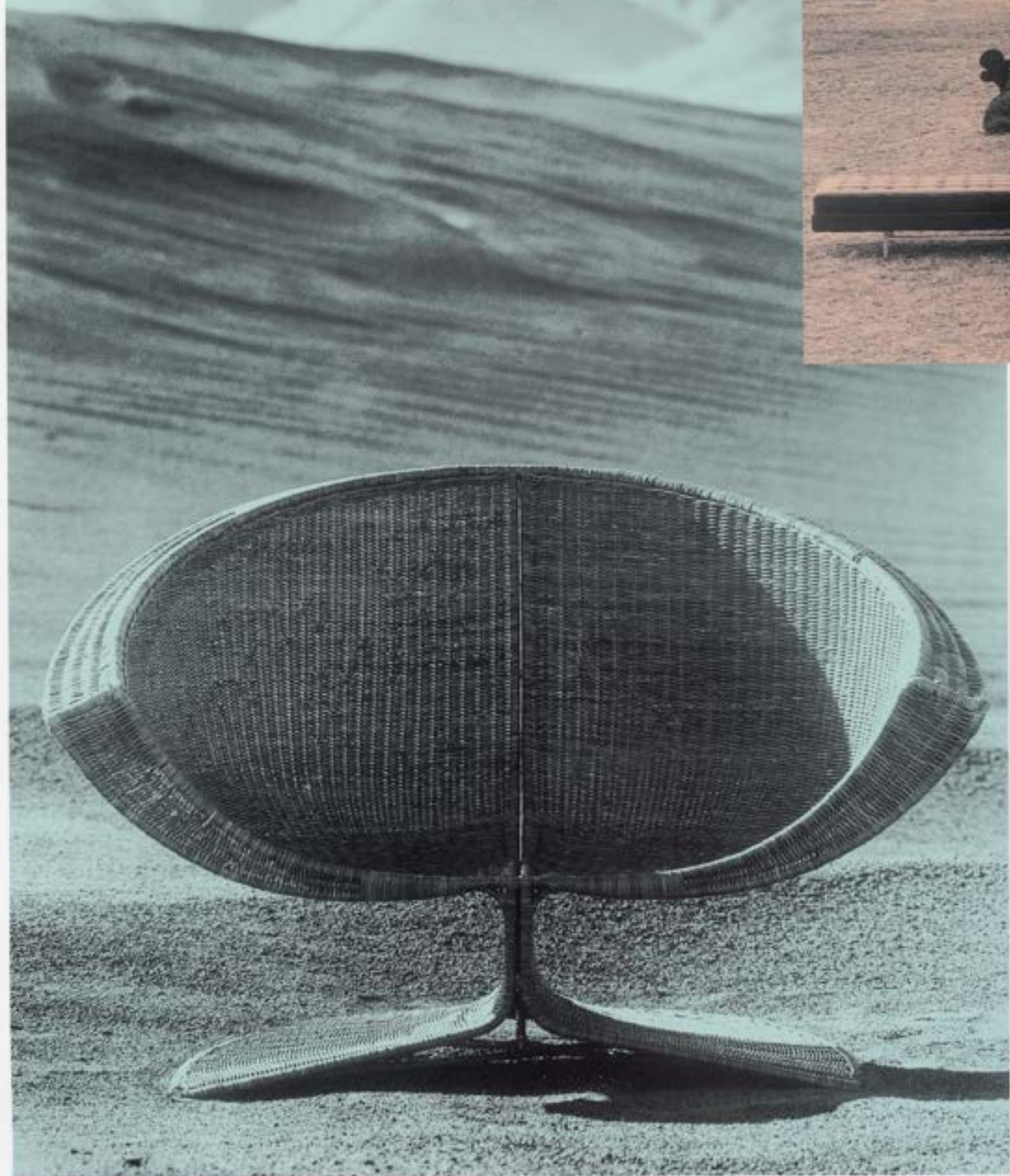
The California Design exhibitions were first conceived as annuals to take place at the Pasadena Art Museum, 46 North Los Robles Avenue (current location of the Pacific Asia Museum). The first seven shows were organized under the stewardship of Clifford Nelson, who served as exhibition designer and/or director until 1961 overseeing CD1 through CD7. Modest booklets of from 15 to 25 pages accompanied these exhibitions. Nelson perceived their mission as showcases of good design. "Good design brings us pleasure, visually and physically," he wrote in the foreword to CD2's brochure. "[It] saves us time, makes our lives easier in an infinite number of ways. An element of our existence so vital and ever present must be acknowledged and granted its due importance."

For the first seven exhibitions, the selection process involved trolling the furniture marts for choice pieces of designed or manufactured home furnishings. At first, the

*Opposite page, top to bottom* Cast aluminum wall medallion by Holt Murrya, "Bouquet in Steel" stainless steel wire sculpture by Tom McAllister ottoman by John Nyquist, rug by Stanley Deckleman, leather and steel chair by Jules Heumann for Metropolitan Furniture Co. (CD10, 44,1,8); Paul Tuttle's cantilevered Z Chair Photo: Danforth-Tidmarsh, Santa Barbara, CA, Detail of wool rug by Francesca Tyrnauer (CD10, 44,1,3) *This page, top to bottom* A variety of forms in handwrought silver by various designers (CD10); Gere Kavanaugh's "Spice Flower" wallpaper (CD10)



# RIDING





## Eudorah M. Moore served as director from 1962 on, “tracking down murmurs” about designers and their work



**Opposite** Miller Fong Chair for Tropi-Cal (CD 10)  
**This page** clockwise from top left Chair by Paul Tuttle, bench by George Kasparian, panel by Vincent H. Suez, selection of sculpture (CD10); Stoneware forms by Ralph Bacerra ranging from 24" to 37" high (CD10, 44,4,6); Tea wagon by Wes Williams with blender/juicer made by Dewenter Industries, Photo: Richard Gross

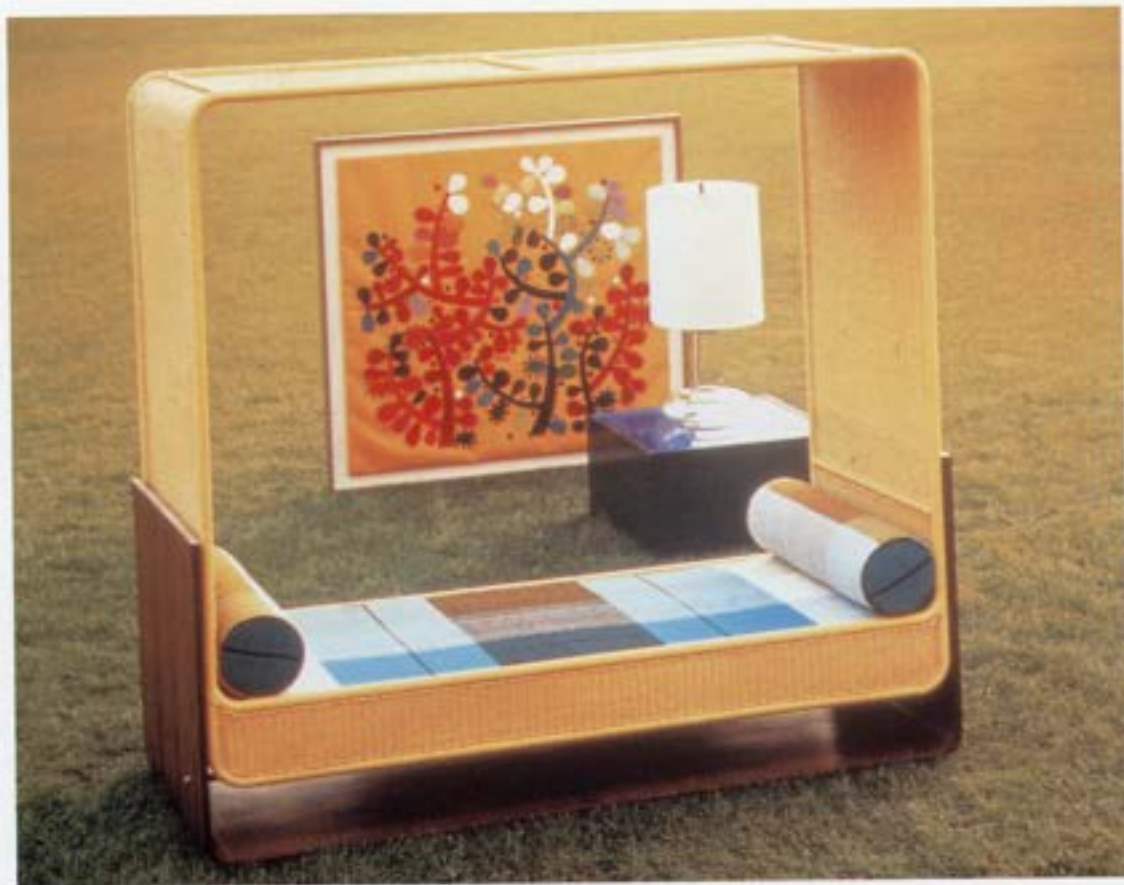
purview was limited to goods which had been manufactured or designed in Los Angeles County, since the exhibitions received a yearly grant of \$10,000 from the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors.

A breakthrough in concept, direction and scope came with the California Design 8 exhibition in 1962, co-directed by two pioneering spirits, Eudorah M. Moore and Elizabeth F.G. Hanson. Moore had been President of the Trustees of the Pasadena Art Museum; Hanson was a member of the Board. The two women approached Thomas W. Leavitt, director of the Pasadena Art Museum, and suggested he hire them, without pay, to stage the next exhibition. He agreed. (Hanson withdrew after CD8, and Moore became the sole director thereafter.)

Groundbreaking innovations began with CD8 and continued through CD76, the last in the series. A press release for CD8 announced, "The exhibition will be much larger in scope than in previous years and will include large scale architectural crafts, accessory crafts, manufactured home furnishings, building materials and industrial designs related to the home."

With CD8, a jury system was established whereby designer-craftspeople were invited to submit objects for selection. Entries in the manufactured division were judged by Moore, Hanson and Leavitt in accordance with an advisory board. Objects submitted in the craft categories were judged by a group of leading designer-craftspeople. Additionally, there was an invitational section for which "distant craftsmen were invited to submit." Objects for jurying were brought to the





Fannie Morrison Horticultural Building in Brookside Park, Pasadena. "You can't imagine how exciting it was to be exposed to this amount of vital energy," Moore recalls. "Craftspeople coming in carrying an extension of their ego in front of them. What other show of this size was juried by object? It was a true exposition of the creative process."

The jury system insured that the exhibition would cast a wider net for talented designers and makers, and no longer be confined to the exhibition director's favorite picks from the Los Angeles Home Furnishings Mart. In a *New York Times* article of November 30, 1961 titled "Californian Combs State For Home Design Talent" the co-directors of the exhibition are praised for spending nine months "tracking down 'murmurs' about California designers and their work."

These massive efforts resulted in a show occupying virtually all of the Pasadena Art Museum, approximately 12,000 square feet of space with over 750 pieces on display—surely, wrote Leavitt in the CD8 catalogue, "the most impressive assemblage of good design from California ever presented."

Two other significant aspects of CD8 and subsequent exhibitions were the formidable publications produced to accompany them, and the national publicity campaigns launched to promote them. Photographer Richard (Dick) Gross was hired to shoot catalogue and publicity stills. His preference was to shoot in the natural landscape using available light. As it happened, the selected objects were being housed in a building in the middle of a park. Gross and Moore would trot pieces out into the park environs and place them on the grass amid the leafy trees, making both manufactured and hand-crafted objects appear to have just sprouted from the earth. Objects were





## Outdoor locations for catalogue photography identified California design with the majestic natural beauty of the state



arranged by groupings to define environments, such as office interiors, domestic room settings, and outdoor patio and garden displays.

Hanson wangled excellent coverage for CD8 out of the New York press. She stocked her suitcase with freshly-snapped catalogue photographs and flew to New York City to distribute them to key editors she had come to know as a former *Vogue* model. "It was a first for a museum to receive this kind of national publicity," Moore says. "It really put California Design on the map."

Beginning with CD9 in 1965—the exhibitions had now become triennials—entries from the entire state of California were eligible. A receiving depot was established in San Francisco, which gave artists from northern California reasonable access to a jurying location. This not only broadened the scope of the show, it provided more options for location shooting. Moore and Gross would choose objects from both depot locations, rent an RV and head for such picturesque spots as the Death Valley desert, the sand dunes of Oceana, the rippling waters of Pismo Beach, and the snow-covered Sierra mountains.

What began as an ingenious and economical approach to catalogue photography became an aesthetic statement that

identified the best of California design with the majestic natural beauty of the golden state. The exhibition catalogs were landmark publications—handsome, hardbound books which swelled from 96 pages for CD8 to 175 pages for CD11. More than 10,000 copies were printed for each exhibition, modestly priced at under \$10.

"In the '60s and '70s, comprehensive exhibition catalogues were not normally published," says Arline Fisch, master metal-smith and jeweler who exhibited her unconventional jewelry designs in almost all the exhibitions. "There might have been brochures or pamphlets, but not quality bound catalogues. Those documents were incredibly important, and the fact that the photographs were so good meant they were used in publicity all across the country. It wasn't just design for Californians to look at, but for the rest of the country, the rest of the world."

*Opposite, top to bottom: Rattan and formed plywood bed by Danny Ho Fong for Tropi-Cal, with stitchery panel by Jean Ray Laury, hand-blown crystal lamp by Clyde Morrison, cube table by Murray Feldman (CD10, 44,4,1); High-fired ceramic sculpture, "Fey Stone," by David Cressey (CD10, 44,4,8). This page: Parker Pattern and Foundry Company electric compact wagon of steel and fiberglass, loaded with and surrounded by pots from various California craftspeople. Photo: Richard Gross (CD8)*





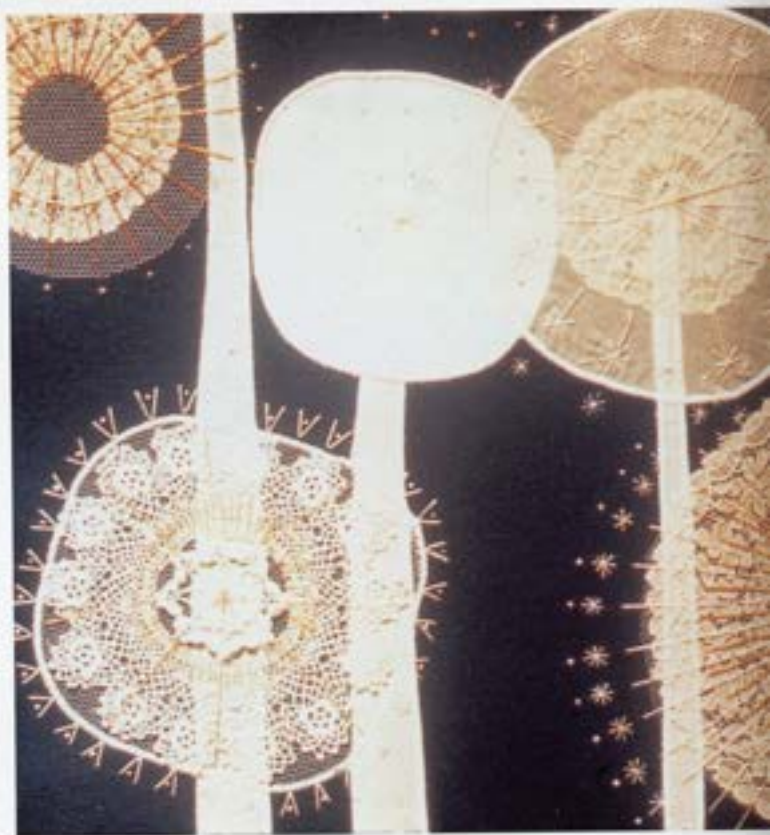
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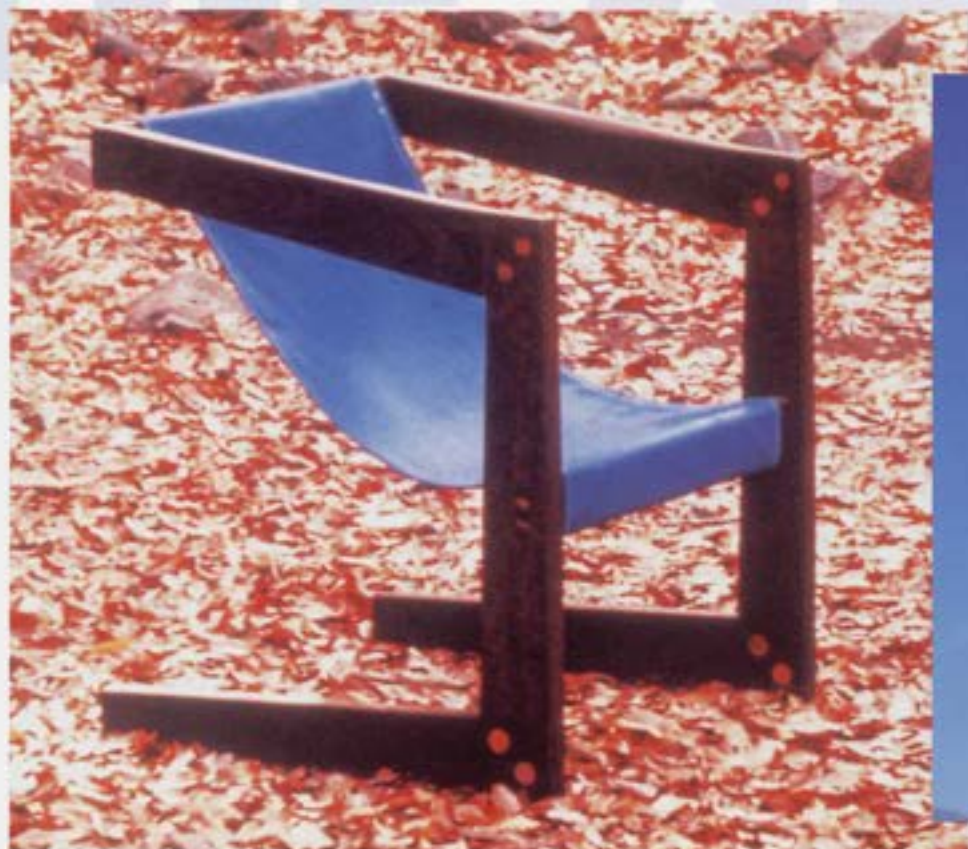
The California Design exhibitions, by far the most well-attended shows on the Pasadena Art Museum's schedule, each drew more than 100,000 visitors. The money raised through entrance fees (admission was \$1) and through sale of publications was plowed back into the program and used as seed money for the next exhibition. But despite their popular and critical success, there was a ceaseless search for funding. Except for providing gallery space, the Pasadena Art Museum provided no financial support.

In 1962, Leavitt had foreseen a bright future for the California Design program, writing of his hopes in the CD8 catalogue that "within a year or two the Museum will be able to establish a permanent Design Center with a year-round program in spacious exhibition galleries in the new building of the Pasadena Art Museum." This forecast proved way off the mark. Leavitt left the museum in 1971 shortly after CD11. Walter Hopps remained the Pasadena Art Museum's curator of fine art.

The Pasadena Art Museum had indeed moved into its new building at 411 West Colorado Boulevard (now the site of the Norton Simon Museum). Although Hopps "had an understanding of what the California Design shows could be, he was simply not interested," Moore says. His agenda was to establish the Pasadena Art Museum as a premiere venue for vanguard painting, sculpture and conceptual art. Hopps viewed the popular







appeal of the California Design series as proof of its commonness. "They denigrated the program, repudiating industrial design and crafts as populist and lowbrow," Moore recalls.

Sensing the hostility, the California Design team decided to establish the program as an independent non-profit organization. This action was taken none too soon, as in 1974 the Board of Trustees of the Pasadena Art Museum welcomed the takeover by Norton Simon, and all the staff was fired. The Pasadena Art Museum, a public institution under the aegis of the county of Los Angeles, was transformed into a museum showcasing a private art collection.

California Design was now an exhibition program without a venue. Still, Moore and her team managed to stage two additional exhibitions. California Design 1910, which took place in 1974 in a vacant Beaux Arts building lent by the city of Pasadena, surveyed the Arts and Crafts movement of California at the turn of the century inspiring a tremendous renewal of interest in preserving the state's rich decorative arts history. California Design '76, a "Bicentennial celebration of the creative spirit of Everyman," was presented at the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles. But by 1976, the exhibitions had played themselves out. Moore began to struggle with the core concept, and wonder whether it was still viable. "The dialogue between industrial design and craft had changed," she told *American Craft* magazine in

August/September 1997. "The languages didn't mesh as well. Increasingly, I felt there was less and less amenability."

"It was a thrilling time," says Moore, who moved to Washington, D.C. where she became craft coordinator for the National Endowment for the Arts. "A show of this size, juried by object, couldn't be done in the context of the museum structure today." That may be so. Nevertheless, the Oakland Museum of California, where the California Design archives are housed, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art have begun to plan several joint programs that will capitalize on the rich archival material and original artifacts of the California Design exhibitions. Their objective: to recapture the spirit and essence of the days when, as designer Miller Fong puts it, California was "an incubator for contemporary design." ○

JO LAURIA is assistant curator of decorative arts at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

*Opposite, clockwise from top left* Plywood chair by Ed Stiles, Photo: Richard Gross (CD10); Plastic radial system chandelier by Ben Gurule, manufactured by Modeline of California (CD9, 44,5,5); Eleanor Neil Coppola's stitchery (CD9, 44,5,5)

*This page, left* Chair of Indian laurel with sling seat by Stewart Metzger (CD10, 44,1,8) *Right* Kinetic constructions by designer/craftsman Douglas Moryl (CD10, 44,1,8)