

WINTERTHUR



Winterthur Press Release

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Winterthur Shows Its Secret Side: Midcentury Modern

Unity by Design exhibit explores the style's broad influence on American design, even at Winterthur.

Winterthur, DE, May 22, 2019—Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library has a secret: Scattered throughout its lounges, libraries, laboratories, and offices are stashes of modern furniture that have as much of a story to tell about American design as the early American furniture the museum is famous for. See it now through July 28, 2019 in *Unity by Design: Midcentury Modernism at Winterthur*.

Unity by Design takes a look at midcentury modern furniture in order to better understand it as an extension of Winterthur's collection and mission—to explore what it means when traditional meets modern. Midcentury modernism refers to the post–World War II design movement that sprung from a desire for a new way of living. The mission was to depart from the past in order to foster a better-lived experience for the future. Although Henry Francis du Pont's desire to promote and preserve American antiques may seem to be at odds with the aesthetic, his interest in style and design was broad reaching and he was as enamored of the new American style as anyone.

Some might be surprised to learn that behind the scenes Winterthur was a little less *Downton Abbey* and a little more *Mad Men*. When du Pont opened Winterthur Museum in 1951, his intention was to expand the interest in, and interpretation of, early American decorative arts. His uncompromising attention to detail enabled him to build one of the most important collections of

early Americana in the world. Yet over 18 years he worked with architects and designers on the construction of several auxiliary buildings on the estate: an office wing and auditorium, a research library, conservation labs, and a visitor pavilion where the interior design presented a radically different look. From fixtures to furnishings, each of these spaces was designed in the midcentury modern style. Those furnishings—more than 170 pieces—are still in use at Winterthur.

“For many years the mid-century buildings and furnishings at Winterthur were not understood, often moved to storage buildings, and considered an anomaly. People sometimes commented that H. F. du Pont would have hated this stuff. As *Unity by Design* reveals, he not only appreciated it, but helped pay for it,” said Jeff Groff, estate historian at Winterthur.

The exhibit displays pieces by famous midcentury designers Ray and Charles Eames, Florence and Hans Knoll, and Eero Saarinen—masters who crafted objects that carried the midcentury modern message to American consumers through simplicity of form, honest use of industrial materials, and a union of art and technology. Their designs for Knoll Associates and the Herman Miller Furniture Company set a new standard for modern living. It was the design choice for corporations, businesses, and homes.

Unity by Design was curated by Carrie Greif, who will graduate from the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture in May 2019, as part of her graduate thesis work. In addition to creating this exhibit, Greif catalogued the midcentury modern furniture on the Winterthur estate.

Visitors to *Unity by Design* are encouraged to explore the philosophy, construction, and branding of midcentury modern furniture by taking a seat and browsing catalogues that were available to consumers in the 1950s and 1960s, and by exploring photographs of Winterthur spaces furnished in midcentury style and sketches by the famous designers themselves. *Unity by Design: Midcentury Modernism at Winterthur* is on display through July 28, 2019, in the Society of Winterthur Fellows Gallery.

Visitors are also invited to see *Costuming THE CROWN*, which features 40 iconic costumes from the beloved Emmy® award-winning Netflix series about the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. *Costuming THE CROWN* is on display through January 5, 2019.

ABOUT WINTERTHUR

Winterthur—known worldwide for its preeminent collection of American decorative arts, naturalistic gardens, and research library for the study of American art and material culture—offers a variety of tours, exhibitions, programs, and activities throughout the year. General admission includes a tour of some of the most notable spaces in Henry Francis du Pont’s former home as well as access to the Winterthur Garden and Galleries, special exhibitions, a narrated tram tour (weather permitting), the Campbell Collection of Soup Tureens, and the Enchanted Woods children’s garden.

Winterthur, located on Route 52, six miles northwest of Wilmington, Delaware, and five miles south of U.S. Route 1, is closed on Mondays (except during Yuletide), Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Museum hours are 10:00 am–5:00 pm, Tuesday–Sunday. \$20 for adults; \$18 for students and seniors; \$6 for ages 2–11. Winterthur is committed to accessible programming for all. For information, including special services, call 800.448.3883, 302.888.4600, or TTY 302.888.4907, or visit winterthur.org.

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