

SEAN BYRNE

CHARLES AND RAY EAMES

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Introduction

Charles and Ray Eames are among the most important American designers of this century. They are best known for their ground breaking contributions to architecture, furniture design, industrial design and manufacturing, and the photographic arts. In the passage below I will discuss Charles and Rays History and work and how they change the look of many homes and business across the world. (Charles and Ray, 2014)

Charles and Rays Eames

Charles was born in 1907 in St. Louis Missouri USA. His father was a veteran of the civil War and work for Pinkerton Detective Agency. His mother was a housewife and mother to him and his older sister, Adele. When his father died in 1921 the family moved in with relations as they were unable to live off the civil wars windows pension of 30 dollars a month. By the age ten Charles had to work to help support his family, working in jobs in a printing shop and a drugstore. When he was fourteen he starting at Yeatman High School and was working part time in steel company. There he learned about drawing, engineering and architecture. This is where he started to think about becoming an architect. After high school he went to Washington University in St. Louis where he study to become an architect. How ever he disagreed with the curriculum. He was intrigued by Frank Lloyd Wright and considered his work to be an essential part of the any architectural curriculum. But when he kept trying to make Wright a subject of study with his professors they would always resistance the matter. He was then advised to stop his advocacy of Wright and after he decides to not stop he was kicked out of the university. In a statement from the university they said "His views were too modern." While still in Washington Charles meet his first wife Catherine Dewey Woermann who was also an architect student. In June 1929 Charles and Catherina got married and immediately went on a European honeymoon provided by Catherina's parents. During which they studied the classical architecture of France, England and Germany. When they came back to the US Charles opened his own architectural office which he did with partners Charles Grey and Walter Pauley. AS Charles struggle to make a living his only child Lucia Dewey Eames was born in 1930. (Koenig, 2005)

In 1933 Charles left his wife and child and went on sojourn to Mexico. He travelled and absorbed the culture around him. When he returned to St. Louis him and his friend Robert Walsh started a new architectural firm, Eames & Walsh which designed several buildings. One of the church's they designed was published in Architectural forum and caught the attention of Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen. Saarinen was the director of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. He wrote to the firm and asked them about there future projects. When Charles received the commission for the Meyer house, his biggest job to date, he talked it over with Saarinen and travelled to Cranbrook where he was offered a fellowship to Cranbrook which he accepted. He began his first semester in the Architecture and urban planning program in September 1938. (Koenig, 2005)

Ray Eames was born in Sacramento, California in 1912. Her father was a manger at the grand theatre in Sacramento. Ray was raised in a warm and protective environment maybe even overly so because of the death of her older sister when she was two. When she was only three she started to draw showing early sings of an artist. At Sacramento high school she exceed in art. She graduated in 1931 and attended Sacramento Junior Collage only long enough to apply to several schools. She was accepted at the May friend Bennett School in Mill Broke, New York which was considered an excellent finishing school. She travelled there with her mother and began school there in September 1931. After she graduated she moved to Manhattan, where she joined the art students league, where the highly respect German émigré painter Hans Hofmann was a teacher. When Hofmann opened his own school she went there and worked with him over a six year period which is said to be a pivotal experience in Ray Eames artistic life. In 1936 she became a founding member of a group called the American Abstract Artists (AAA). The group try to promote the rights of abstract modernists to have their nonrepresentational work shown in the city's museums and galleries. Ray paintings were exhibited at the first AAA show at the Manhattan Municipal Art Galleries. In 1939 rays mother moved to Florida after falling ill and ray move there to care for her until her death in 1940. She then applied to the Cranbrook Academy of Art that summer and started their in September 1940. (Koenig, 2005)

Ray and Charles Eames first meet in Cranbrook when Charles was a teacher and Ray was a student. At the time Charles was still married Catherine but according to some facts his relationship was at breaking point at this time. Charles devoiced from his wife Catherine in May 1941 and in June of that year Charles and Ray Eames got married and started a new life together in California. Charles then got a job at MGM studios, working in the art department. (Koenig, 2005)

Charles and Ray Eames were both know for there modern thinking and outstanding design. There aim was to produce modern attractive furniture at an affordable price. There preference of material was mainly plywood. They showed how affordable material could be used to create elegant pieces of furniture. They used modern styles at that time to create furniture such as curved plywood chairs.

Famous Works

The Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman

Its history goes back to 1940 Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) show “Organic Design in Home Furniture”. Among the prototypes submitted for the show by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen was a Lounge chair with modern aesthetics that offered the comfort of a traditional arm chair. In 1945 and 46 Charles and Ray experiment on a lounge chair made from three sections of curved moulded plywood that was never produced. Many versions of the chair were made each a learning experience moving closer to the finish product they wanted. Ten years later in 1956 the first prototype was made .The first run of fifty chairs fabricated for the Herman Mill showroom was mechanically tooled and then put together by hand. The chair was debut on National Television on the Home Show. Charles prepared a two minute video of the manufacture, assembly and packing process of the chair. The chair sold for 404 dollars and was an immediate bestseller. By 1975 Herman Miller had sold 100,000 of them. The lounge chair and Ottoman unchanged expect for new filling made of decor and foam and the rosewood replaced with walnut is still in the Herman Miller catalogue and is currently selling for 4559 dollars. (Koenig, 2005)



Wire Mesh Chairs

The Eames used the method of resistance welding that they were experienced in using for their metal rod bases for the wire chair, weaving the metal into small squares for strength in the centre, surrounded by open horizontal lines at the outer edges. The rim of the chair is made from a heavier gauge wire that is doubled to increase the overall strength and stability. The Eames Office was awarded the first American mechanical patent for the design of this chair. The chair was available in three looks: fully upholstered, partly upholstered that had padding in a triangular shape on the back and seat of the chair, and one with no upholstery at all. The chair was marketed by Herman Miller from 1951 to 1967 and was reintroduced by the company in 2001. It is currently for sale by the Herman Miller Company for 729 dollars. (Koenig, 2005)



Plastic Chairs

The Eames began to use plastic when it was available in post war. They incorporated the design of their curved plywood chairs in the designs of the plastic chairs. Their first fiberglass armchair was developed as a prototype for the 1948 museum of modern art "International Competition for Low-Cost Furniture Design." The chairs were built at Zenith Plastics using the latest tooling technology. The Herman Miller Company ordered 2000 of the plastic chairs and put them on sale in 1950. The natural marbled fiberglass came in parchment, grey, beige, and later the palette was available in primary colours. There were six different types of the chair - wooden legs, metal rod legs, the "Eiffel Tower" wire struts, a cast-aluminium pedestal with casters, a swivel style and a rocker version with birch rockers on wire struts. (Koenig, 2005)



After study a lot about the lives of Charles and Ray Eames and what they did to change the ways of furniture and architectural design though out there lives it has change my overall opinion of designers. Before doing this assignment I never took great increase in what designer created a peace of work that I like but more on how it was made. I feel that Charles and Ray are one of most influential people towards furniture design and towards modern furniture and architectural designs. They produce furniture such as the curved plywood chairs at affordable prices. At the time no other designers were creating modern pieces like this made from materials like plywood, plastic and metal.

The piece of furniture that I like the best is the Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman. Although this was one of there most expensive chairs its look of class and comfort made it a favourite of my. I like the use of the three different sections of curved sections of moulded plywood with a rosewood veneer finish on the chair also with the buttoned black leather upholstery which give it a rich and warm feel. The Ottoman with the lounge chair completes it for me as it shows to me somewhere I could sit back and put my legs up and relax for hours.



One of there designs that I feel is nice to look at but did not look comfortable to sit on was the wire mesh chair with no upholstery. I also felt that the all metal chair would not be suited in many homes at that time it was created. Different to the full upholster and partly upholster wire mesh chair it look cold and uncomfortable.



Overall my opinion of Charles and Ray Eames is that they are one of the greatest designers to come out of American and they give the world groundbreaking designs that change look of furniture and architectural designs for many people.

Conclusion

After completing this assignment I am happy that I was assign Charles and Ray Eames as I found there life very interesting and there work to be interrering. I now have a much better understand on the work that goes into designing a project and what designers have done for this world.

Bibliography

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