CHARLES AND RAY EAMES:
SHAPING DESIGN THROUGH VISUAL IMAGERY

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by
LORINDA J. BRADLEY

Dr. Kristin Schwain, Thesis Supervisor
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled:

CHARLES AND RAY EAMES:
SHAPING DESIGN THROUGH VISUAL IMAGERY

presented by Lorinda Jean Bradley,
a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Archaeology,
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Introduction

Midcentury modern design and architecture is pervasive in contemporary American culture. It is featured in museum exhibitions; studied by scholars in the fields of architectural, art, and design history; and showcased in contemporary popular culture in magazines like *Dwell* and television shows, most notably, *Mad Men*. Charles and Ray Eames have become icons of the movement, and their designs have come to define modern American values during an era of rapid political and social change.

Today, postwar America is romanticized in in popular media and characterized as a time of unrestrained joy in the American way of life. However, cultural leaders and everyday citizens struggled to define that ideal in the 1940s and 50s. For most, the answer rested in consumer goods. Postwar American consumers were bombarded with new products that promised to reduce time spent on laborious tasks and increase their leisure time, a lifestyle championed by popular magazines including *Life, Look, Vogue*, and several others. Since many of these products were cheaply produced through mechanical processes, consumers were required to replace them regularly.¹

Charles and Ray Eames embraced a decidedly different approach to design at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where they met in 1940. Charles Eames, Jr. was born

in St. Louis, Missouri where he went on to study architecture at Washington University. However, after only two short years of study, he left the university and worked at an architecture firm before beginning his own firm with his partner, Charles Gray and later Walter Pauley. Their business was hit hard by the Great Depression and failed to flourish, thus Charles arrived at Cranbook in 1938 after receiving an invitation from Eliel Saarinen. Cranbrook Academy of Art was inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and promoted honesty of construction, truth to materials, learning from established traditions and a high concern for quality guided the production of art and design. The following year, Charles accepted a faculty position at Cranbook in the design department before being named head of the Department of Industrial Design in 1941.

Ray Kaiser was born in Sacramento, California before moving around with her family during her early years. After graduating from May Friend Bennett School in Millbrook, New York before studying abstract expressionist painting under her mentor, Hans Hoffman in New York City. Ray was one founder of the American Artists group with whom she exhibited several abstract paintings at the Riverside Museum in New York. She enrolled at Cranbrook, in 1940, where she was introduced to a multitude of media including textiles and graphic design.

Charles and Ray met and formed a personal as well as professional relationship at Cranbook. They married in 1941 and, that same year, moved to

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3 For a more complete history of the Eameses’ early lives, see = Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, 9-56.
California to pursue their own work and develop their own aesthetic, drawing heavily on Cranbrook ideals, the Arts and Crafts movement, the Bauhaus, and Alvar Aalto. They sought to produce affordable, high quality designs for the expanding middle class. Their structurally sound designs made use of new technologies and materials and humanized the cold minimalism of the then-dominant International Style. However, the Eameses design process was predicated on excessive experimentation and as they became well known throughout the world, they exchanged their focus on affordability to solve many of the pressing social problems of their time: information exchange, visual pedagogy, and international conflict.

As their primary media for communication became films, multi-media presentations, and exhibitions instead of architecture and furniture design, the Eameses increasingly promoted the importance of the visual image and its potential to concretized abstract ideologies. Their reliance on the image; the juxtaposition of images; and the sequential movement of still images required, in turn, the viewer’s active and sustained attention. The Eameses strategically cropped and planned their composition of their images to provide their audience with illustrations of larger ideas, for example, a day in the life of the average American (see chapter three). Throughout their long career, the Eameses became increasingly skilled in their use of images to communicate particular messages and took intense control over their designs and their promotion as their work progressed.

The Eameses’ use of images in their design process, pedagogy, and self-promotion is apparent in scholarship on the couple and the archives they
established. Most of the existing publications on the Eameses are heavily illustrated celebrations of their work, providing broad overviews of their careers but not contextualizing them within the complex political and social era in which they lived. Moreover, the general focus on furniture at the expense of their toys, films, and exhibition designs skews their larger design philosophy and fails to attend to their sincere efforts at social reform.

After Charles’s death in 1978, Ray Eames worked with Marilyn and John Neuhart to create a catalog of their work between 1941 and 1978. The resulting book, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames*, provides detailed descriptions of each piece in chronological order and offers a strong foundation for research on the artists. Pat Kirkham’s book, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, followed years later. She analyzes the Eameses’ career and provides an in-depth look at the complexities present within each project as well as Charles and Ray’s relationship. Informed by recent feminist scholarship, reconsiderations of Modernism’s history; and oral interviews, Kirkham’s study is fundamental to understanding the lives and legacies of the Eameses. Indeed, the

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shadow cast by her book upon Eames scholarship is enormous, heavily impacting subsequent scholarship, including my own.

Another critical resource for any study of the Eameses is their extensive collection of over 250,000 photographs, now located at the Library of Congress. They photographed everything from birthday cards they received in the mail to objects in their home to details of fabric, architecture and vegetation. The Eameses used these photographs intensely during the design process, carefully comparing and contrasting images to determine a work’s optimum form, texture, color, and composition.

This thesis builds on Kirkham’s critical assessment of the Eameses and relies heavily on the Eameses’ photographs to examine three projects that represent a broad range of their productions. Specifically, I seek to model Alice Friedman, who focuses on case studies to interpret the wider trend of “American glamour” in modern architecture. I do so to highlight two interrelated themes that permeate the Eameses’ body of work. First, I examine the manifold ways they created architecture, furniture, film, exhibitions, and domestic and commercial spaces, typically gendered female and male respectively, that reflected contemporary

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gender norms but not the dynamics of the couple. They were clearly cognizant of this of this distinction and the couple’s marketing campaigns, films, and multimedia productions sought to bridge this gap. Second, I show how every object they created became a multi-media production; they not only designed an object, for example, but they also choreographed the commercials, films, advertisements, magazine articles, and exhibitions that surrounded it. Their designs relied heavily on the juxtaposition of detail and honest working methods that the Eameses highlighted throughout the media used for promotion.

The Eameses’ designs were targeted at the middle and upper classes, aligning much of their work with a particular kind of American glamour, one explored thoroughly in Alice Friedman’s book. She defines American glamour as an aesthetic ideal in modern consumer culture as well as a cultural aspiration.\(^\text{10}\) In postwar America, glamour became highly gendered. It was associated with the home and sponsored by the intense production and consumption of consumer goods directed as women. Indeed domestic products became the focus of consumption defined American life both at home and abroad.

The first chapter focuses on the Eames House, the abode designed by the couple just outside of Los Angeles. Originally designed for the Case Study House Program and highlighted in *Arts & Architecture*, it quickly became a model of modern living. Instead of focusing on the home’s impact on modern architectural practices, I used the film they created, *House: After Five Years of Living*, to argue that

\(^{10}\) Friedman, *American Glamour*, 4.
items within the home – its interior decoration – were equally important to the couple. While the film represents an early attempt by Charles and Ray Eames to control the perception of their work, the house’s reception in popular magazines indicates that they did not yet have complete control over their public image. Indeed, the house’s presentation in *Life* and *Vogue* marketed the home as ideal for the new relaxed lifestyle of the middle class family, a model challenged by the Charles and Ray’s working partnership.

The Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman is, perhaps, their most acclaimed and iconic product. The chair broke from the Eameses’ early goal to provide affordable furniture to the average American, illustrating a shift in the couple’s focus from democratizing design to targeting wealthier clients and corporations. Although chapter two discusses the chair within this context, it also addresses the complexities of Charles and Ray’s relationship through the gendered depiction of the chair in advertisements and television shows. By analyzing how the chair was marketed and received, I show that it marks a pivotal point in the Eameses’ career. It reveals their intense desire to maintain control over the marketing and meaning of their products in order to better align them with their design ideals and pedagogy.

The final chapter examines the Eameses’ multi-screen film for the American National Exhibition in Moscow, *Glimpses of the U.S.A*. Created in 1959, the film addresses the political and social tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Drawing on methods they developed earlier in their
careers, Charles and Ray’s portrayal of a day in the life of an average American
focused on similarities between the American and Russian people to provide a
positive introduction to the exhibition and, at the same time, propagandize the high
standard of living available in the United States. The exhibition exemplified the
United States government's attempt to use domestic products as evidence for
capitalism’s superiority over communism. However, the multi-screen film also
provides visual evidence for the Eameses’ skill in the selection and juxtaposition of
images.

Although my project draws on previous scholarship, it stands apart in that
my analysis relies heavily on the close examination of a few objects through the
Eameses’ increasingly disciplined use of images. The Eameses’ insistence on
controlling the image of their work discloses a tension between their vision and
America’s perception of their working relationship, designs, and life. Together, the
three case studies discussed in this paper trace the way in which Charles and Ray
Eames became far more sophisticated in how they utilized multimedia to present
particular messages about themselves, their work, and their belief systems.
Chapter 1 – The Eames House

When the Eames House debuted in *Arts & Architecture* in 1949, it was immediately embraced for the domestic ideals it established for modern America. Countless magazines and newspapers articles in publications ranging from *Arts & Architecture* to *Vogue* to *Life*, championed the house as a model of relaxed glamour and modern architecture that made room for living. Examining the Eames House through its contemporary reception in various publications reveals the myriad ways it portrayed post-war middle-class ideals of domestic design and modern lifestyle. However, the Eameses’ film, *House: After Five Years of Living* also reveals an early attempt at controlling the way in which their home was viewed, focusing on the details they deemed essential to understanding their values and belief systems. The Eameses utilized imagery to communicate the importance of quality materials in design and unique, personalized details in order to retain a human element in a postwar, modern household.

The House

The Eames House sits upon a 1.4-acre piece of land that overlooks the Pacific Ocean from the top of a 150-foot cliff in Pacific Palisades, California. Constructed mainly from prefabricated steel, glass, and other industrial materials, the house is divided into two separate two high rectangular buildings that are connected by a small patio (Figure 1). Painted black, the steel frame of the structure divides the façade of each building into smaller rectangular segments of either large, expansive
windows and doors or stucco painted various colors, including white, gray, red, blue, and yellow, that recall Mondrian paintings and the De Stijl aesthetic. A large, natural meadow lined with trees expands before the house and separates it from the cliff at the other end of the property. The Eameses took full advantage of the trees on the site, using eucalyptus trees to break the sharp, colorful plains of the house, create natural wallpaper for the interior, and provide shade from the California sun.

Old railway sleepers formed the pathway running in front of the two buildings, providing a walkway from the street to the home. The studio, where the Eameses Office primarily operated until 1958, is the smaller of the two buildings and the first visible upon approach from the street. The Eameses positioned it as the public interface of the site, their personal living space shielded for more privacy. The two-story building contains an open workspace and dark room on the lower floor with storage space and a small sleeping area for employees working late hours on the top floor. The interior has primarily white walls that the Eameses used as blank canvases to illustrate their ideas.

The domestic area of the house boasts an open floor plan and is considerably larger than the studio space adjacent to it. When a visitor came to the home from the studio, she entered the kitchen. Relatively small, the kitchen counters and cupboards from a U-shape, allowing for a hall to run along the front of the building before opening up to the living space with double high ceilings. The floor plan is open, allowing the Eameses to move furniture and objects freely throughout the
space. A small nook lined with couches juts off the living room and establishes a cozy living area (Figure 2).

A spiral staircase in the hall leads to an upper level that has approximately half the square footage of the lower level and holds the Eameses’ bedroom that is tucked towards the back of the house. The walls of the domestic space, like the studio, are white, save for the northern wall of wood paneling that adds a warm, welcoming feeling established through the use of the natural material. The house itself is largely plain, working as a frame what the Eameses called “functioning decoration.” Functioning design, as Kirkham defines it, is a term the Eameses used to “describe their carefully composed arrangements of disparate objects, some of which were quite small, with interior spaces. The aesthetic was one of addition, juxtaposition, composition, changing scales, and ‘extra cultural surprise.’”

The original design for the Eames House consisted of an “L” shape plan that included a bridge-like structure that elevated the house and provided a direct line of sight to the Pacific Ocean (Figure 3). When the building materials were delivered to the sight, however, Charles and Ray significantly altered the layout and design of the house to fit their needs as a professional couple. The revised plan simplified the design, removed the bridge, and reoriented the house toward the wild meadow.

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11 For a discussion on Eames “functioning design,” see Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames: 168-170.
12 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 164.
13 James Steele, Eames House, 9.
that the Eameses increasingly embraced (Figure 4).\textsuperscript{15} The first design cut into the meadow, splitting it in half to provide an advantageous view of the ocean. By retaining the meadow, Charles and Ray Eames repositioned the house and enabled the Eameses to utilize existing trees as a natural screen for the home. However, this decision placed the house closer to the Entenza House and created the need for a retaining wall, which significantly increased the overall cost of construction.\textsuperscript{16}

Constructed of two rectangular buildings, the Eames house accommodated Charles and Ray’s personal and professional lives and highlighted the couple’s unique relationship. As both working and sexual partners, the Eameses were not the typical married couple. The separate workspace allowed for privacy away from other employees in the Eames Office, but allowed Charles and Ray easy access to their projects. Their domestic and professional spheres had a similar structure, allowing the separate parts to constantly converse and intersect with each other.

The Eameses’ unique needs and modern aesthetic mandated an innovative, open design plan that utilized contemporary industrial materials. Nevertheless, they domesticated its industrial construction with wood-paneled walls and the reintroduction of decorative objects into the interior. As Esther McCoy aptly states, the Eameses had “an affection for objects,” an ideal rooted in the Arts & Crafts movement aesthetics and associated with Cranbrook.\textsuperscript{17} The couple brought back interesting trinkets and items found on their world travels and positioned them

\textsuperscript{15} Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 114.
\textsuperscript{16} Steele, \textit{Eames House}, 9.
within the home. Often, their positioning challenged the way people thought about objects by presenting them in new ways and adding unexpected excitement. For example, on many surfaces, the Eameses arranged natural pieces such as plants, stones, and tumbleweeds with objects such as bowls, dolls, and textiles taken from different locations and cultures. Putting crafted objects, pieces of high art, housewares, and other found items in close proximity, they created thought-provoking associations and juxtapositions (Figure 2). The Eameses positioned the personal items within the home after painstaking planning that involved the use of photographs, which would become increasingly important throughout the couple’s long career. Looking back on the process, Ray said:

We used to use photographs. We would cut out pieces for photographs and put them onto a photograph of the house to see how different things would look. For instance – there was a space in the studio we wanted filled. It was between the depth of the floor where it opens for the stairs (this is not so in the house, where there is a balcony rail). We wondered what to do. We had some pier pylons from Venice pier (we wanted to keep something of it to remember it by). Well, we had pictures of it, glued it onto a photo and decided it worked so we went ahead and did it.18

**House: After Five Years of Living**

Indeed, the house itself stood as a modernistic frame for the unique objects within the home. The Eameses’ film, *House: After Five Years of Living*, reinforced the importance of the objects to the Eameses’ conception of the house. Composed of hundreds of slides created over the first years they occupied the home, the film

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presented still images to the rhythm of the upbeat, cheerful music composed by Elmer Bernstein. The first several shots are of the exterior of the home, introducing the viewer to the subject of the film. However, the emphasis on details within the interior soon becomes apparent as closely cropped images focus on textures and patterns as well the couple’s massive collection of objects and botanicals (Figure 5).¹⁹ For example, scenes of Eames windows shift to a still life of hairbrushes, trinkets, and shells Ray carefully arranged on a polka dotted textile. Images of design supplies, toys, dolls, paintings, furniture, and various other objects around the home are given far more attention that the architecture. Together, the overwhelming number of images creates a consistent vision of modern space that is transformed into a playful, yet functional space through juxtapositioned objects.

For the Eameses, the Case Study house embodied their vision of domestic life and professional partnership. However, they also employed it to promote their brand, targeting various constituencies through a range of media. Advertisements, magazines, film, and other publicity materials indicate the myriad ways the Eames House became part of middle-class American popular culture. The plethora of images reinforced the assimilation of the Eames aesthetic into various circles of industry, art, retail, and fashion. Popular magazines proclaimed that the modern lifestyle was for everyone; it was built around a single-family home where Americans could relax and take advantage of the timesaving appliances that made

¹⁹ To select images, the Eameses laid slides out on the table and drew connections between images with pencils and colored pens. See Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 188.
leisure not a luxury, but an entitlement. Photographs of modern interiors flooded these publications, offering design advice and marketing consumer goods through product placement. By examining the presentation of the Eames house in three particular magazines – *Arts & Architecture*, *Vogue*, and *Life* – it becomes clear that the Eameses’ House was interpreted in a variety of ways that met the needs of middle-class audiences committed to contemporary architecture, to modern lifestyles, and to the ideal of the nuclear family as the foundation of American culture.

*Arts & Architecture*

The Eames House was conceived as part of *Arts & Architecture*’s prestigious Case Study House Program, launched in 1945. *Arts & Architecture* was founded in the 1910s as a home and garden magazine that portrayed California’s picturesque luxury homes.20 When John Entenza bought the magazine in 1938, he revamped its image and emphasis to focus on international modern architecture that blurred the line between architecture and design. Entenza also shifted attention away from luxury homes to low-cost housing that solved site-specific problems such as a less-than-ideal natural landscape or specific needs of a patron.21 In this way, he catered to the many young architects and designers that migrated to California before the onset of the Great Depression. This highly intellectual and optimistic community

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21 For instance, McCoy, *Blueprints for Modern Living*, 145.
aspired to create an architecture that engaged the newest technologies and trends in design.\textsuperscript{22} However, the magazine’s designs remained strictly theoretical as the economic realities of the Great Depression and World War II drastically reduced architectural construction until the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{23} With the end of the war, Entenza and the architects he championed sought to realize the ideals that had been gestating for over a decade.

Entenza’s architectural interests coincided with the national and domestic ideals that blossomed as soldiers returned from war in 1945. The home became the focus of consumption and the centerpiece of American life, representing democratic and capitalistic ideals as the United States entered the Cold War with the Soviet Union in the early 1950s. Entenza and others predicted a housing shortage following the end of World War II and attempted to create models for what they believed and hoped postwar America would look like. The focus of Arts & Architecture turned to design and architecture that utilized new technologies and trends as well as household conveniences the expanding middle class now sought to take full advantage of with their increased spending power.\textsuperscript{24}

Entenza introduced the Case Study house program in a 1945 issue of the magazine dedicated to postwar living. Entenza intended Case Study homes to be

\textsuperscript{23} Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, \textit{Eames Design}, 49.
low-cost, experimental modern prototypes that epitomized the aspirations of modern architects in California.\textsuperscript{25} The program announcement stated:

[Each] house must be capable of duplication and in no sense be an individual 'performance'... It is important that the best material available be used in the best possible way in order to arrive at a 'good' solution of each problem, which in the overall program will be general enough to be of practical assistance to the average American in search of a home in which he can afford to live.\textsuperscript{26}

Entenza originally invited eight architects and firms to participate, but expanded it to include thirty-six designs, thirty-four of which were actualized before Entenza sold the magazine in 1966.\textsuperscript{27} Since Entenza personally invited all the architects that partook in the program, the Case Study homes reflected the editor's personal inclinations toward the International Style and complete design. The many homes including Case Study House #22, the Stahl House, consisted of clean and largely white steel constructions that remained unornamented and utilized geometric forms and minimalist design. However, like the Eames House, the Stahl House accounted for and was largely planned around the site, incorporating the surroundings within the house and utilizing the indoor-outdoor lifestyle available in California.

The Eameses’ relationship with Entenza and the production of \textit{Arts & Architecture} helped to solidify Charles as the designer of two houses within the Case


\textsuperscript{26} John Entenza, "The Case Study House Program," \textit{Arts & Architecture} 58 (1945), 38.

Study House program. Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen designed Case Studies #8 and #9, the first was Charles and Ray’s home. When *Arts & Architecture* featured the house, it presented the second design to readers. The article depicts the home in final stages of completion (Figure 6). Workers putting the finishing touches on the construction are the only individuals portrayed in the magazine’s story and little furniture is visible within the home. The images used by the magazine focus on the floor plan and the materials used in construction, proudly pronouncing the use of high quality materials while keeping the construction costs to a minimum. The humanizing designs and objects the Eameses added to the interior went unmentioned along with the cost of the furniture, which allowed the magazine to remain true to its emphasis on modernist design at reasonable prices.

However, the house’s “functional design” was essential to the Eameses’ conception and realization of it added a human touch to the otherwise cold, clean aesthetic of the building. The magazine’s attention to the structure as opposed to the way the Charles and Ray chose to live within it shows a difference between the ideologies of the Eameses and Entenza. Although predominantly an avant-garde magazine, *Arts & Architecture* boasted a relatively large readership due to its focus on particularly “American” conceptions of architecture targeted at the upper-middle class as well as young professionals. Entenza’s target group largely aligned with

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28 Charles wrote many articles for *Arts & Architecture* and partook in round table discussions on the aesthetics and direction of postwar architecture while Ray designed well over twenty magazine covers. Refer to Steele, *Eames House*, 9.
the Museum of Modern Art’s “Good Design” shows that attempted to educate individuals who were conscious about design trends and had the funds to pay for them. Although many midcentury designers and architects, including the Eameses, attempted to keep the price of their products low, the combination of high quality materials, sound construction, and product development put this aesthetic outside the reach of many Americans who turned to lower quality imitations that needed frequent replacement and encouraged a disposable lifestyle.

Entenza’s vision of relaxed California glamour required a level of neatness uncommon for the average American – and the Eameses. The objects within the couple’s home were largely personal and added considerable clutter to the space, and custom furniture, fine art, and found objects took away from the focus on the structure and industrial materials that applied to postwar construction across the United States. Although Arts & Architecture sought to define architecture and set a standard of acceptable consumption after the war, its narrow definition of modernism appealed less to the masses than architects and the design conscious.

On the one hand, the Eameses’ house fulfilled the intention of the program better than the previous homes in that it used prefabricated, standardized industrial

31 Most people only knew these modern houses from pictures in magazines, so developers did not need to duplicate the experience of being inside these unique creations. They just needed to add a few aspects, like a sliding door patio and a picture window in the front to increase the feel of spaciousness in the suburbs. See Lynn Spigel, Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001), 32.
materials such as concrete, glass, and steel.\textsuperscript{32} By breaking from the previous wood-framed constructions, the Eames House created a new precedent for Case Study houses to follow.\textsuperscript{33} Subsequent houses, such as Richard Neutra’s Case Study #13, utilized steel instead of the wood construction.

On the other hand, the Eames House did not fully represent the ideals the program because the Eameses designed it for themselves, not the average middle-class family. The Eameses had unique needs, as they required a studio, dark room, and a space for furniture production.\textsuperscript{34} As Dolores Hayden suggests of designers of the time, “[They] simply assumed that they could generalize about ‘the American family’ from their own, and their clients’, elite vantage point.”\textsuperscript{35}

In the end, the Eames house represented a key tension in the Case Study program: the homes were intended to address architectural challenges and solve social problems, not meet the needs of individual home-owners. The Eames House, like many of their later projects including the Lounge Chair and Ottoman, offered such a solution. The final design created a model for living in close quarters with neighbors while maintaining privacy, as well as combining private and public spheres in a small space. As Charles said, “Case Study-wise, it is interesting to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, \textit{Eames Design}, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, \textit{Eames Design}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{34} McCoy, \textit{Modern California Houses}, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Dolores Hayden, ”Model Houses,” \textit{Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses}, (Lost Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1989), 209.
\end{itemize}
consider how the rigidity of the system was responsible for the free use of space and to see how the most matter-of-fact structure resulted in pattern and texture.”

**Vogue**

From its start in 1892, *Vogue* defined American taste and decorum and became the arbiter of fashion for the social elite. Dedicated to high society living, the lushly illustrated magazine provided a voyeuristic glimpse into the lives of the wealthiest individuals through and used carefully composed photographs to encourage the reader to model herself and her home after the article's protagonists. *Vogue* tracked the lives of the elite, along with their sophisticated style and taste in art and leisure for a readership that was eager to utilize its new wealth and act out its social ambitions. *Vogue*’s unique influence on the American public gave it unparalleled access to important style makers, who aimed to supply the inspiration and aspiration for a glamorous, modern lifestyle.

Throughout the 1940s, Dr. M. F. Agha was the Art Director for major publications such as *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* as well as other high fashion magazines that had international readerships. He created the modern and integrated approach to the layout of feature articles on fashion, travel, health, and other activities that characterized modern living.37 His a-symmetrical, streamlined designs championed photographs as advertising material and minimized the use of text and illustrations.

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to increase visual impact. Photograph layouts within *Vogue*, especially, stressed experimentation with design decisions regarding color and composition.\(^{38}\)

The Eames House was featured within the pages of *Vogue* multiple times throughout the 1950s. In April 1954, the magazine used the home as a frame for the modern California lifestyle *Vogue* championed within the issue. The magazine claimed that two-piece houses were the new practical form of living, supplying a necessary segregation between living quarters and working rooms in order to create a new form of escapism while remaining at home. The article went on to argue that the relaxed California lifestyle was spreading across the country, encouraging informal social living with an emphasis on enjoying the outdoors from within glass walls. *Vogue*’s audience agreed, and these California ideas would spread to summerhouses everywhere.\(^{39}\)

The photographs of the Eames house focused on models wearing beach attire, the perfect fashion statement for leisurely living (Figures 7-8). The mats within the home make the floor useful as a table, with all necessary objects within the model’s reach. Positioned in the corner of the living room, the photographs focused attention on the wall of glass windows. Fashion models lie and stand within the open space, bathed in the California sunlight, emphasizing the expansive windows of the modern home. The Eames House provides a frame for living, 

\(^{38}\)“The first photographic cover of *Vogue* was a watershed in the history of fashion illustration and a watershed mark of its decline. Photographs, no matter how altered or retouched, will always have some association with reality and by association truth.” Laird Borrelli, *Fashion Illustration Now*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000),

allowing the space to be transformed according to the owner’s needs; in this case, sunbathing in the latest trends.

In August 1959, the house was again the subject of a multipage spread focusing on Charles’ life and work: “Eames is not only a Twentieth-century man, he may be verging on the Twenty-first-century Man.”40 The article talks about the Eameses’ lifestyle and designs, celebrating Charles’s artistry and ignoring Ray’s active role in the pair’s innovative designs, In fact, in one of the few references to Ray, the writer focused on her appearance: “Although she is not actually pretty, she has enormous attractiveness, partly because she looks full of pleasure, warm, enthusiastic – a delighted, happy woman with just a spark of temper. Whatever she touches becomes beautiful, without any deliberate thinking on her part.”41 Clearly, Ray did not embody Vogue’s ideal of physical beauty; however, she did align with the woman’s role of beautifying the home. Vogue’s coverage of the couple’s lives positioned Ray within traditional gender roles, underestimating her essential contributions to the couple’s achievements. While describing the house, credit again went to Charles, explaining that the house fulfilled his needs of low cost housing with a separate workspace. Aligning the Eameses with an upper class lifestyle, Vogue carefully points out their use of a maid to keep the space clean.

One photograph within the spread included the Eames House while the others focused on Eames designs and Charles’ attractive smile (Figure 9-10). The photograph of the home was taken within the living room with the large glass

windows as a backdrop. Ray and Charles sit on the floor in the bottom of the photograph, beaming from ear to ear and hugging their knees (Figure 10). The photograph emphasizes the house's modern aesthetic at the expense of the personal items decorating it. A painting by Hans Hoffman is one of the few objects included in the photograph, aligning the couple with high society art collectors. These carefully cropped images, *Vogue* emphasizes Charles as the designer of American glamour and the couple as its domestic embodiment.

*Life*

Although highbrow publications utilized the modern design of the Eames House, popular social magazines such as *Life* took a more humanistic approach to the subject by supporting a varied set of social ideals. Like *Arts & Architecture, Life* developed in the late 1930s and was driven by the image of the American Dream.  

*Life* purportedly depicted everyday life of popular America. The editor, Henry Luce, provided interest and enabled people to see this kind of lifestyle through the pages of his magazine.  

To Luce, pleasure was in the visual, and from its early stages, *Life* emphasized high quality photography and graphics as well as the portrayal of comfortable, suburban living aided by labor saving domestic technologies.

As the years progressed, *Life* became one of the most popular and influential publications in the United States. In the late 1940s and early 1950s – the prime time

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of the Case Study House program and Arts & Architecture – Life reached its highest
readership and claimed that “twenty-one percent of the entire population over ten
years old,” or 22.5 million people read the magazine consistently.\(^\text{45}\) When television
took over as the leading source in information transfer, Life subscriptions did not
suffer. In fact, Life claimed people who read their magazine more likely owned a
television than nonreaders.\(^\text{46}\)

Although the magazine claimed to represent the average American, Life
portrayed a carefully planned and edited picture of American culture. It formed
opinions of modern life; it showed a lifestyle that embraced modernism; and it
revealed Americans how to create this lifestyle for themselves.\(^\text{47}\) Life’s main
readership fit comfortably within the middle class and usually lived in urban areas,
rarely in small towns and on farms.\(^\text{48}\)

Life targeted people “in the know” and showed the latest and greatest
technological developments produced at the time. In this way, like with Arts &
Architecture, Life appeared at the perfect time. Technological breakthroughs,
including kitchen appliances, cameras, and other utilitarian objects, appeared on the
pages of Life. The images within the magazine celebrated a life of luxury and
pleasure, with middle-class Americans surrounded by the most innovative

\(^{45}\) Field, The People Look at Radio, 99.
\(^{46}\) Baughman, “Who Read Life?,” in Looking at Life Magazine, ed. Erika Doss
\(^{47}\) Most magazines did not target the lower class because they assumed that lower
waged workers would not have the necessary expendable income to regularly
purchase magazine subscriptions, see Baughman, “Who Read Life?” 43.
\(^{48}\) Baughman, “Who Read Life?” 43.
appliances in the most fashionable settings. The magazine supported America’s image of itself as both exceptional and uniquely favored because of its embrace of modern technologies and its promotion of consumerism and capitalism.

Modern architecture provided the setting of many images within the magazine, especially in the middle of the 20th century. In the September 1950 issue of Life, the recently completed Eames House was featured in a six-page spread. Not only does this speak to the importance of modern architecture and living to the magazine, but it also shows the profound interest placed upon the Case Study House program. Life was one of the countless periodicals that covered the house prominently within their articles.

The image of the Eames House that Life represented was substantially different from that of Arts & Architecture and Vogue. Unlike the architecture magazine, Life avoids explicit mention of aesthetics and modern design theory in favor of an image-driven article that spends more time discussing the unique life of Charles and Ray Eames. While the images in Arts & Architecture avoided showing the Eameses living and working within their home, Life made this its central focus aside from one: an image of the famous Eames Chair (Figures 6, 11, 12).

The images work to highlight the original lifestyle the house accommodated, a lifestyle few in the United States could achieve. According to the story, both Charles and Ray were self-made individuals whose names had become synonymous with modern design. The Eameses designed a house to meet their unique personal

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49 Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, Eames Design, 45.
50 “A Designer’s Home of His Own,” Life, September 1950, 148-152.
and professional needs, which presented an alternative to the lifestyle generally celebrated in the magazine. The images within the *Life* article show the couple in a beautifully lit and carefully planned home, enjoying their creative design processes as well as the scenery displayed through the giant windows. The combination of the self-made Americans with glamorous furnishings made the Eameses approachable and their lifestyle attractive, but still out of reach of the average American.

The articles on the Eames House in popular magazines provided different views of the house: *Arts & Architecture* concerned itself with aesthetics, modern materials and solutions to design problems; *Vogue* championed the California lifestyle; and *Life* focused on the relationship between the house and the lifestyle of its designers. However, these emphases were consistent with the magazines’ readerships. While, *Life* had a higher circulation than the other two magazines, all three reveled in new visual pleasures frame the activities of postwar America.51

**The Eames House and its Various Representations**

The magazine articles that covered the Eames house offered a unique, privileged view into a way of life that was natural for the couple. Through the images, it is clear that work and design played essential roles in the lives of both Charles and Ray and that together, they designed a space that spoke to their sense of style and beliefs about decoration and design. For the most part, the house shares one of the key values espoused in their furniture designs: the use industrial

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materials to create a sense of lightness (Figure 2). At the same time, the ideals that shaped the Eameses’ design of the house reflected a more general architectural movement to humanize the minimalist modernism of the International Style.

Indeed, the Eames House represents one American architectural ideal for postwar living.

The images utilized by *Arts & Architecture*, *Vogue*, and *Life* showcase the importance of consumption to middle-class American culture in the mid-20th century. With an increase in consumer items due to industrialization and wartime advances in technology, Americans used objects and spaces to define themselves. However, there is a tension between the way the magazines portrayed the Eameses’ ideals as opposed to the way Charles and Ray Eames articulated their own values through their film, *House: After Five Years of Living*. *Arts & Architecture* revealed its ideologies through the way it addressed the Eames House, focusing not on the people, but the building and aesthetics involved. *Vogue*, in turn, portrayed a highly gendered view of the Eameses’ relationship and their home, crediting Charles and critiquing Ray’s physical appearance in comparison to her feminine skill of beautifying their home. *Life* focused on products and technologies in combination with a modern lifestyle in order to increase efficiency and fashion simultaneously.

The magazines show preferences of a privileged class that is not fully representative of the United States, but displays the ideologies popular in mid-century design circles.
Although the Eameses’ design principles were not widely utilized throughout the United States, their exposure through mass media reveals the overwhelming preoccupation with the relationship between modern architecture and glamour associated with the upper middle class.\textsuperscript{52} The Eameses’, conversely, made an early attempt to control the representation of their architectural design and focus on the important details of the home that made the space a statement of eclectic American modernism, promoting the deeply personal objects within the domestic sphere that spoke to the Eameses’ values, influences, and ideals.

\textsuperscript{52} See Lynn Spigel, \textit{Welcome to the Dream House}, 32.
Chapter 2 – The Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman

The Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman, now considered an icon of midcentury modern design, consistently appears in popular media and television as a sign of personal luxury for the design conscious elite.\(^53\) Debuting in 1956, the chair has been continuously manufactured by the Herman Miller Furniture Company. However, chair itself, as well the advertisements and cultural images associated with it, differ significantly from the Eameses’ original vision of themselves as designers of low-cost furniture manufactured for the masses. Indeed, the media produced on the chair by the Eameses shows it served as a transitional piece between their earlier, molded-plywood chairs and their later multimedia presentations for corporate patrons. It represents, too, the increasing control the Eameses took on the advertisement and promotion of their products. Perhaps learning from their experience with the myriad media representations of their home, which often differed dramatically with their own understanding of it, they sought to shape the cultural messages communicated by the Lounge Chair and Ottoman. The challenge they faced is clearly seen when comparing NBC’s dramatic unveiling of the Chair on television to the film the Eameses made showcasing their vision of the design’s quality, production, and targeted consumer.

An Eames Legacy

The Lounge Chair and Ottoman was introduced to America on NBC’s *Home* in 1956. The producers claimed that this was more than a chair; it was a monumental event in design history as well as a symbol of modern American glamour.\(^5^4\) The show began with the voice of the host, Arlene Francis, describing the Eameses ten-year history of chair production. The camera then focused one of the first chairs Charles and Ray designed as a team for Herman Miller, the DCM, as it twirled mystically in the air.\(^5^5\) The scene then switched to an overview of a stage that included Eames chairs arranged chronologically, establishing a evolution of chair design that began with the Molded Plywood Chair (1945-1946) to the more recent fiberglass chairs, and finally, the Lounge Chair and Ottoman.

Like many of their later projects, the Lounge Chair and Ottoman developed from a previous experimental design the Eameses were not fully satisfied with.\(^5^6\) Charles and Ray Eames began their furniture experiments at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan where the pair met. Charles’s experimentation with plywood preceded that of Ray and developed from a long history of molded-plywood as a solution for modern furniture that retains human values yet utilizes the newest


\(^5^6\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 50
materials and technologies in order to create a modern domestic space.\textsuperscript{57} Heavily influenced by Aalvar Aalto’s work of the 1920s and 1930s, Charles Eames partnered with Eero Saarinen on a molded-plywood chair they entered into the Museum of Modern Art’s \textit{Organic Design in Home Furnishings} competition in 1940 (Figure 13). Although the chair was considered innovative and widely praised, compound curves created problems with splintering plywood and ultimately proved too complicated and expensive to manufacture and market to the American public.\textsuperscript{58}

When Charles and Ray moved from Cranbrook to California in 1941, they continued experimenting with plywood with the goal of creating quality furniture that remained true to its materials while remaining affordable for the middle-class family. However, the first of the Eameses’ plywood pieces to be mass-produced was not a piece of furniture, but molded-plywood splints designed for the United States Navy as a lightweight, comfortable alternative to the heavy unhygienic metal splints (Figure 14).\textsuperscript{59} This commission allowed the Eameses access to the latest technologies developed by the Allied countries, including synthetic glues and stronger plywood, innovations that would prove vital to their furniture experiments in the following years.\textsuperscript{60} The Eameses’ successful experimentation with plywood was largely a manifestation of the resources poured into the development of new

\textsuperscript{57} Martin Eidelberg, “Charting the Iconic Chair,” \textit{The Eames Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design}, Martin P. Eidelberg ed. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Art Museum, 2006), 25.
\textsuperscript{58} John R. Berry, \textit{Herman Miller: The Purpose of Design}, (New York: Rizzoli, 2001), 82.
\textsuperscript{60} Kaplan, Tigerman, and Adamson, \textit{California Design}, 187.
materials and techniques for wartime use, which would have a tremendous impact on postwar design and manufacturing. After they completed their wartime obligations, the Eameses were again free to dedicate the majority of their time to experiments with furniture production.

Postwar American designers embraced machine-made modernism, attempting to make modern furniture widely available to consumers so that they could replace what they considered the fussy, old-fashioned designs of their ancestors. While there was a joy in things and a celebration of objects, much of the machine-made furniture was cheaply made and encouraged a disposable lifestyle. The Eameses saw a place within design where quality craftsmanship could meet low-cost needs to produce a truly American modern aesthetic. Charles and Ray Eames were among a group of postwar designers that sought to reform taste and retain democratic ideals. Eames stated, “[Our objective was] to get what is ultimately the most of the best to the greatest number of people for the least.”

The Eameses’ ideals largely matched those of the Herman Miller Furniture Company and the designers they employed, but developed from the influence of the Arts & Crafts movement and the Bauhaus. The early furniture the Eameses

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61 For examples, of technological advances, see Jeffrey Meikle, Design in the USA, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 132.
62 Hine, Populuxe, 13
63 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 202.
64 Charles Eames made similar declarations many times in his career. This variant was taken from the transcript of an interview with Charles and Ray Eames on the television show Discovery, produced by the San Francisco Museum of Art for KPIX, a CBS affiliate, aired December 17, 1953. Charles Eames and Ray Eames Papers, box 7, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
developed was designed for the middle class American and was largely made affordable through mechanical manufacturing. Mechanical production combined with organic design and natural materials such as wood made the designs warmer, allowing them to fit naturally within the home and become durable, getting better with age. Eames chairs were still expensive, although within the reaches of the expanding middle class. They sought to counter “disposable consumerism,” the manufacture of furniture made of cheap plastics and unstable materials that required them to be replaced within a relatively short time.\textsuperscript{65} Not only made to last, the Eameses believed that the minimalistic style allowed their furniture to make transitions between rapidly changing furniture fashion trends. The Museum of Modern Art had similar goals and held exhibitions to educate Americans on “good design” that appealed to popular taste. The DCM and subsequent Eames designs were used in these exhibitions as examples of successful designs that fused technical advancements with organic forms (Figure 15). As Arlene Francis highlighted in her television introduction of the Eameses, just ten years after its release, the DCM chair had become widely popular, becoming a best seller and inspiring imitations that allowed the Eames aesthetic to permeate American visual culture and making “Eames” a household name.

In the years that followed, the Eameses developed several legendary molded-plywood chairs using their “Kazam! Machine.” The Molded Plywood Chair was the first chair produced, quickly followed by the DCM later in 1946, both of which the

\textsuperscript{65} Hine, \textit{Populuxe}, 66.
*Home* show included on the stage, building anticipation for the reveal of the latest Eames design (Figures 15-16). In developing these early chairs, the Eameses abandoned the idea of a singular molded-plywood shell in favor of constituent parts in order to solve issues of splintering wood and slow production rate.⁶⁶ Charles and Ray Eames made their designs readily available through the Herman Miller Company, which marketed the furniture as “not only the most advanced part of the Herman Miller collection, but the most advanced furniture being produced in the world today.”⁶⁷ Seeing their plywood experiments as largely fulfilled, the Eameses moved their focus from plywood to that of fiberglass and would not return to molded-plywood furniture until the development of the Lounge Chair and Ottoman in 1953 (Figure 17).

**Charles and Ray: Public versus Personal Perception**

After the brief introduction to Eames design history, Francis invited Charles Eames onto the stage to introduce exciting news: the Eameses were going to give the television audience the first look at their latest chair designed for Herman Miller. A moment later, Ray Eames joined her husband as Francis explained, “This is Mrs. Eames and she is going to tell us how she helps Charles design these chairs.”⁶⁸ Visible unease passed between Ray and Charles as Ray awkwardly explained and

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underemphasized her role in the couple’s working relationship, suggesting that she critiqued her husband’s designs by keeping the big picture in mind. Charles quickly jumped in to mention Ray’s prestigious start as a painter who studied under Hans Hoffman. Francis, however, was a product of her time and continued to insist that Ray was “behind the man,” playing a supportive role to Charles’ genius.69 Francis requested that Charles explain the intention and theory behind the various chair designs; in the mean time, Ray mysteriously and silently disappears from the stage.

Charles saw Ray’s contribution as more important than his in many ways, but history tends to under privilege her contributions and align her decorative skills with traditional feminine concerns. Although Ray recognized her lack of technical skills when compared to those of Charles and others working in their office, the technical and aesthetic aspects of the pieces they designed were so closely related it is difficult to separate their individual contributions.70 Keeping with her past as a student of Hans Hoffman, scholarship tends to credit Ray’s contributions to that of color, form, and interior décor arrangements, aligning her role closely with the postwar ideal of the suburban housewife. However, Charles constantly emphasized her value, claiming Ray’s contribution was strongest in structure consistency.71

Traditional gender roles played a large part of Ray’s almost invisibility; however, other factors were involved. Charles had been established by the time the

69 Francis, “Interview with Charles and Ray Eames.”
71 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 82.
two met and Ray switched much of her focus from painting and textile design to
more closely relate her interests to those of Charles. Her husband seemed
embarrassed by the lack of understanding about their partnership, the interview for
*Home* being only one of many examples. However, Charles was seen as the interface
of their partnership as he was far more comfortable with public speaking and
running the firm on a day-to-day basis, while Ray preferred the environment of their
firm. Ray was remarkably shy, thus Charles dealt with clients and employees.72

In an interview concerning the Lounge Chair and Ottoman, a former Eames
staff member, Don Albinson, stated that Ray was not centrally involved in the
technical development of the chair.73 He said, “She sat in on all the presentations I
made, and the two of them were very interested in forms and shapes. Then I would
make the next prototype. Ray was mainly in the capacity of discussing forms and
shapes and color.”74 Albinson, however, overlooked an important detail in the
working relationship of the couple. Charles and Ray Eames were known for their
extraordinary work ethic and consistently took projects home to work on alone,
without the assistance of their staff members.75 Ray may have not been present
when Charles addressed the staff about chair prototypes, but this does not mean
Ray was not actively involved; she shared her opinions with Charles privately.76 Ray

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72 Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 86.
73 David A. Hanks and Pat Kirkham, Interview with Don Albinson, in *The Eames
Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design*, (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Art Museum,
2006), 149-153.
74 Hanks and Kirkham, Interview with Don Albinson, 149-153.
75 Kirkham, “The Evolution of the Eames Lounge Chair,” 56.
76 Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 57.
was a perfectionist, streamlining the plywood designs Charles worked on previously and guiding their designs to produce the best possible solution to the design problems they faced.

The above emphasis on Ray is not to suggest that their partnership was completely equal, but to point out that Charles and Ray Eames had an extraordinarily complex relationship with the professional, personal, and sexual spheres constantly intersecting for more than thirty years. It is impossible to say which of them was responsible for specific aspects of their work, but it is important to note Ray’s considerable achievements along with those of her husband. As Pat Kirkham so elegantly states, “They recognized each other’s talents, interests, abilities, ideas and encouraged each other to develop them to their fullest.” The Lounge Chair and Ottoman’s appearance on Home, then, did not provide the public with an accurate depiction of the Eameses’ partnership.

A Glamorous Debut

After Arlene Francis felt they had adequately addressed the breadth of the Eameses’ production, the lights on the stage quickly dimmed and the elegant sound of violins chimed in, setting the scene for a glamorous debut of their newest design (Figure 19). The screen in front of the chair lifted as the camera zoomed in for a close up. A spotlight then illuminated the soft curves of the wood and comfortable down cushions upholstered in black leather.

77 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 70-71.
78 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 78.
The chair contains three separate molded-plywood pieces made from rosewood; two steel pieces connect the three parts vertically and remove pressure from the plywood bends (Figure 17). Even though the chair was produced with a multitude of leather color options, black was (and continues to be) the most popular choice.\textsuperscript{79} The leather chosen by the Eameses was of the finest glove quality and was picked for its fine, soft, thin consistency.\textsuperscript{80} The Ottoman consists of one piece of molded plywood set upon a steel base that matches the one supporting the chair. The Lounge Chair and Ottoman were sold as separate pieces through the Herman Miller Company; however, as with the debut on \textit{Home}, the chair is rarely seen without the ottoman accompanying it. The attention to detail within the chair was astronomical; the Eameses’ perfectionism required over two years of experimentation before they considered the chair complete.\textsuperscript{81} Their use of the finest quality materials and design precision placed the chair in the realm of the economic elite, a far cry from their first plywood experiments.

According to Charles Eames, the pair never saw the Lounge Chair and Ottoman as a successful solution when compared to their previous plywood chairs, although he admitted that people had gotten a tremendous amount of pleasure from it, so it was not considered a failure.\textsuperscript{82} Indeed, when the name “Eames” is mentioned, one usually things of this chair first. It has come to be known as the “Eames Chair,”

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Black was the most popular color. White became popular in the 1970’s when the chair was “rediscovered.” For more information on the Chair’s early production, see: Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 231.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Kirkham, “The Evolution of the Eames Lounge Chair,” 56.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Thomas Hine, “A Half a Century of Lounging: Sightings and Reflections,”43.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, \textit{Eames Design}, 207.
\end{itemize}
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taking the limelight away from the practical designs the Eameses championed at the beginning of their long career.

The Lounge Chair and Ottoman did not conform to the democratic ideals the Eameses envisioned for their furniture and veered away from the designers’ previous plywood products such as the Molded Plywood Chair and the DCM (Figures 15-16). By the time the chair made its debut in 1956, the Eameses had strayed a long way from their early ideas of modern furniture for the masses. Charles and Ray Eames had become well established and created a reputation based on high quality products that were extensively tested before their release for production. Their products were designed without compromise as they had a great deal of artistic freedom, never defined by market demands. The couple became less concerned with affordable furniture and focused their attention on solving particular problems in furniture design as well as commissions that they believed maintained the integrity of their work together.83 With each project they took on, the Eameses spent a large amount of time, energy, and money to research and develop it. The obsessive perfection of their work focused on the details, which Charles claimed, “make the product. It is, in the end, these details that give the product its life.”84

This move from mass-produced, low-cost furniture to high-end luxury pieces coincided with a change in the Herman Miller Company, which remained the retailer

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83 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 258.
of most of the Eames products. When Herman Miller started working with Charles and Ray Eames, they were genuinely concerned with the domestic market in an attempt to bring quality design to the American public. It shared many of the ideals that MoMA advertised in their *Good Design* shows, working to place focus back on individual objects that held integrity.\(^{85}\) MoMA celebrated high quality, visually appealing modern furniture pieces meant for everyday use in the home.\(^{86}\) However, Herman Miller’s high standards and prices put many of its products outside the reach of the average American and appealed more to corporations and institutions whose main concern was product durability.

The Lounge Chair and Ottoman met the needs of MoMA and the Herman Miller Company, institutions less concerned with low-cost products for working class America. However, this followed a trend present in many midcentury designs championed by MoMA, Herman Miller, and institutions concerned with design quality. Concerned that consumption had reached its peak in the postwar buying frenzy, major corporations changed their marketing strategies to account for the economic boom in 1954 and to entice buyers into spending their increasing incomes on more expensive furniture.\(^{87}\) The chair thus falls into a period of “Populuxe” products, during which people took unabashed joy in objects, thrilled about the higher standard of living made possible by an unprecedented distribution of

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\(^{87}\) Hine, *Populuxe*, 11.
disposable household income. The Lounge Chair and Ottoman, then, embodies these ideals and works as a statement of personal luxury fit for the modern world.

**Eames Advertisements and Image Control**

In the first years after its initial appearance, the Eameses carefully controlled the publicity material by Herman Miller to market the chair. They promoted the chair to middle-class homes and sought to address the increased leisurely lifestyle championed by popular magazines and period newspapers. The chair’s appearance, after all, spoke of relaxation and comfort even without a person to lounge on the soft down cushions.

Three early advertisements by Herman Miller provide important perspectives on the chair. An ad from 1956 reads, “Herman Miller presents an upholstered lounge chair designed by Charles Eames” (Figure 20). The ad goes into more detail, claiming, “The use of feather and down-filled cushions gives one the luxurious feeling of settling in. The leather cushions have built-in wrinkles, and that is a clue that spells comfort to come, like the war well-used look of a first baseman’s mitt.” The reference to baseball not only encourages a masculine interpretation of the chair, but also positions the chair within a uniquely American identity that appeals to the nostalgia of America’s favorite pastime.

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The image accompanying the text shows the chair angled from the back and in bright red. The man seated in the chair lounges back, wearing a button-down shirt and pleated pants, crossing his feet casually. As he smokes his pipe and reads the newspaper, he is facing away from the viewer, allowing his face to be shielded by the headrest, which enables the viewer to imagine himself in the place of the sitter.

Two subsequent advertisements by Herman Miller send the same message. The first depicts a small, blonde boy seated in the chair playing with an airplane, dwarfed by the enormous size of the piece (Figure 21). The plane recalls modern technological advances while the boy speaks to the domestic. The text reads, “It’s a man’s chair by Herman Miller . . . luxuriously comfortable, completely relaxing, supremely handsome. Charles Eames designed it for old-fashioned bliss, new-fashion tastes. Slipper-soft black leather, cradled in rosewood.”90 The next ad from 1959 shows a father in his pajamas asleep in the chair holding a new, sleeping baby while a bottle lays idly between them (Figure 22). The line accompanying the image says, “Even if you don’t have two o’clock feeding at your house, we think you will appreciate the deep comfort of this rosewood and leather lounge designed by Charles Eames for Herman Miller.”91

90 Herman Miller Advertising, “It’s a Man’s Chair,” 1957. Reproduced in: Martin P. Eidelberg, The Eames Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Art Museum, 2006), 120.
91 Herman Miller Advertising, “Even if you don’t have two o’clock feeding at your house, we think you will appreciate the deep comfort of this rosewood and leather lounge chair designed by Charles Eames for Herman Miller,” 1959. Reproduced in:
These early advertisements by Herman Miller are pointedly masculine, almost always depicting a man seated in the chair within the walls of his suburban home. The Eameses and Herman Miller were targeting the new domesticated male that *Life* had discovered in the previous years. As the magazine argued, men were beginning to have a larger role within the home, taking on many responsibilities to keep their homes in order.\(^9\)2 Men would return from their workplaces, educated on modern design through their office furnishings and communicate these trends to their wives, thereby partaking in the decoration and style of their households. Men were told they needed to be an active part of their families and households, but also partake in the leisurely lifestyle they had earned after a hard day’s work. Much of this family time revolved around the television, a technology that transformed the arrangement of the living space and encouraged men to have their own reclining chair in which to relax.

Although design connoisseurs praised the chair, there were many criticisms that pointed to the piece being unsuited for the average middle-class home. The first was the price. In 1956, when the chair was introduced, it sold for $404 and the Ottoman sold separately for $174.\(^9\)3 The price alone placed the within the elite and away from the average American. The Eameses were unhappy with the cost of the

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\(^9\)3 In 2004 dollars, the $578 for the Lounge Chair and Ottoman translates to $4022. This figure is calculated with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis online inflation tool (http://www.edsel.com/pages/timline.htm, quotes month-by-month production figures that addup to only about 85,000).
chair, since it conflicted with their early goals of supplying affordable furniture to the masses; however, it was unavoidable because they insisted on the highest quality leather and wood. The chair, although mainly machine manufactured, required hand finishing and assembly. Charles and Ray had set out to create an American equivalent of the comfortable leather lounge chairs found in English gentleman’s clubs, but the luxury associated with that ideal set the chair out of the reach of middle-class consumers.  

Another prevalent criticism was the large size and isolating nature of the chair. The Lounge Chair and Ottoman, constructed to lean in order to comfortably accommodate the relaxing man, took up far too much space in a suburban home with limited space. The chair was far better suited to a modern home with an open floor plan where the chair’s presence was less intrusive. The chair did not fit the needs of the middle-class American and soon, advertisements changed to better address the chair’s corporate clientele.

After the 1960’s, the advertisements for the Lounge Chair and Ottoman changed significantly, showing not only a change in who the chair was marketed to, but also a change within the Herman Miller Company. One advertisement from 1973 shows a man in a plaid suit wearing reading glasses and focusing on the reading material in his hand (Figure 23). He holds a pen in his right hand as he adjusts his glasses and rests in the Lounge Chair. The caption reads, “When they load you down

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94 Kirkham, “The Evolution of the Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman,” 57.
95 Berry, Herman Miller, 91.
with heavy reading, you’re ready for an easy chair.” As this advertisement reveals, the target of this advertisement was no longer the suburban working father. Instead, the advertisements were directed towards the high ranked executives who were more likely to buy the chair. The criticisms about its cost and size did not apply to this market since these men could afford the chair and its isolation spoke to the owner’s prestige. The men depicted within the Herman Miller advertisements projected informality, yet emitted an air of power and control. Similarly, Herman Miller’s clientele focus largely shifted as they moved away from the domestic market in the 1960’s and 70’s and began producing office systems and marketing to corporations whose main concern was durability and quality over price.

Even though the Eameses enjoyed early success in designing low-priced domestic furniture, their later furniture and success came from corporate offices and wealthy, design conscious consumers. The Lounge Chair and Ottoman and the advertisements for it record the transition of the Eameses’ focus from the domestic to the corporate sphere and from the middle-class father to the male executive. The Lounge Chair and Ottoman, then, represents the inevitable result of the Eameses’ working process: a high-quality design produced through extensive experimentation, intense attention to detail, and the finest materials available.

97 EOG (Executive Office Group) & the Multipurpose Series advertising brochure, Herman Miller, 1959.
98 Hine, "Half a Century of Lounging: Sightings and Reflections, 35.
99 Berry, Herman Miller, 117.
A Better Idea of the Chair

The *Home* reveal of the Lounge Chair and Ottoman gave the piece a sense of Hollywood glamour that did not conform to the image Charles and Ray Eames and Herman Miller wanted for the chair. The view of the camera positioned Charles within a tight frame that only made room for the chair beside him. Charles Eames quickly explained the materials used for the chair before he firmly suggested, “I think it would be a better idea if we would just build it for you right here and you could see something about it.” Finding the *Home* show’s representation of the Eameses’ design an inadequate depiction of the chair, Charles quickly took control of the scene with a short film that encapsulated the vision the Eameses held for their design. The Eames Office created the two minute and fifteen second film the previous weekend to explain their design to the television.

The film shows a male Herman Miller employee in casual attire assembling the chair (Figure 24). The film begins with the base and shows the subsequent fifty steps at an accelerated rate until the chair is full assembled. Then, the man relaxes in the chair, taking a much-needed rest after his hard work. The Ottoman then begins to assemble itself, appearing out of thin air. Again, assembly begins at the base and continues until the cushions are added as the final touch. The man then puts his legs on the Ottoman just as a woman’s lower body appears in the frame. Her stiff figure slides across the space as she holds a large envelope in her hand. Her feet

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100 During the Eameses’ appearance on *Home*, Charles refers saying, “This is a typical Herman Miller employee.” See Arlene Francis, “Interview with Charles and Ray Eames,” *Home*, (1956).
are flat and unmoving, petrified in their current position. The man remains motionless as the woman passes; perhaps he has fallen asleep because the chair is so comfortable. After that, the perspective changes, the music slows, and the man is shown facing away from the viewer, now in a suit and reading the newspaper. The tempo of the film has slowed to real time, bringing the pace of the man’s life down as he takes time to relax. A woman’s image, perhaps his dream wife, slowly appears at his feet, mystically materializing on the Ottoman and looking adoringly at the man’s feet before she slowly fades again into nothingness. The man transforms back into the Herman Miller employee in casual clothes and sneakers, his face again visible to the audience. He disassembles the chair quickly with the help of another male employee. The film ends as they package the Lounge Chair and Ottoman in separate boxes with the Herman Miller logo displayed proudly on their sides.

The film was the Eameses’ effort to control the reception of the Lounge Chair and Ottoman during a show that had its own motives in proclaiming the chair as a design event. The film’s focus was on the chair, turning a seemingly boring piece of furniture into an entertaining production while informing the viewer exactly how the Eames chair is assembled and packed and who Herman Miller imagined its customer to be. The film identifies the chair as masculine; big enough to accommodate the male body comfortably. It also presents the chair as luxury item. The Herman Miller employee dreams that he is the future owner of the chair, a wealthy man in an expensive suit who enjoys a leisurely lifestyle and the loving devotion of an adoring wife. Interestingly, the traditional housewife only appears in
a dream, while the working is presented as a reality. Indeed, the first woman in the film is another Herman Miller employee. The film emphasizes the sleek, finished pieces of the chair that work together to form the modern ideal of male domestic comfort.

The film offers an alternative view from that of the Home show in that it emphasizes the construction and quality of the chair as it is constructed and deconstructed by the Herman Miller employee. The film focuses primarily on the process the chair goes through in order to reach the consumer, pointing to the Eameses' ideals of truth to materials and joy in labor. The Home show, contrastingly, showed an overly glamorous reveal, fixating on the designer name and legacy associated with the chair instead of reinforcing the high quality that had become synonymous the Eameses' name.

The film demands undivided attention from the audience due to the quickly changing elements that coincide with cheerful, fast tempo music. In its form and content, it looks ahead to the Eameses' increasing focus on multi-media presentations and international exhibitions. In these presentations and exhibitions, they fully utilized their increasingly sophisticated manipulation of images to encourage intensive looking in order to communicate their belief systems as well as their various clientele's ideals.
Chapter 3 – Glimpses of the U.S.A.

In January 1959, designer George Nelson flew out to California to meet Charles and Ray Eames in their home. The United States Department of State commissioned Nelson to design the “American National Exhibition” for display in Moscow that summer. Officially characterized as a “cultural exchange,” the government hoped it would alleviate tensions developed during the Cold War.\(^53\) For their part, Nelson asked the Eameses to create a film that would illustrate a day in the life of an American citizen for Soviet audiences in the exhibition’s opening building: a large geodesic dome designed by the architect Buckminster Fuller (Figure 25). Charles and Ray quickly agreed and spent the next three days in intensive discussions planning the basic outline for the exhibition with Nelson; Billy Wilder, the Hollywood film director; and Jack Masey, Chief of Design and Construction for the exhibition. Over the next few months, the Eameses and their staff continued to develop what has become their most famous, multi-screen presentation, *Glimpses of the U.S.A.* The film presents 2,200 still and moving images in twelve minutes to create what Buckminster Fuller later called “a language of the everyday life of human beings.”\(^54\) The result was a glittering portrait of American life that utilized a sequence of still photographs on seven screens to show Soviet citizens the United States and connect the two nations through observable


similarities. The film was by all accounts successful, evoking strong emotional reactions from even the most unlikely of figures, Nikita Khrushchev.

Americans saw themselves as the preeminent leaders in the manufacture of domestic products for the modern home and used what Joseph Nye calls “soft power” to attract Soviets towards the American way of life and the capitalist economy that enabled it. According to historian Greg Castillo, soft power seduces the intended audience by displaying “culture, values, belief systems, and perceived moral authority” and luring viewers to apply the learned standards and ideologies to their own lives. The United States ambassador to the USSR, Llewellyn Thompson, suggested the exhibition should “endeavor to make the Soviet people dissatisfied with the share of the Russian pie which they now receive, and make them realize that the slight improvements projected in their standard of living are only a drop in the bucket compared to what they could and should have.”

In 1953, President Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) with the intention “to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the U.S. national interest, and to broaden the dialogue

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between Americans and U.S. institutions and their counterparts abroad.”

Jack Masey, the Chief of Design and Construction for the upcoming exhibition in Moscow, recruited George Nelson and together with the Eameses and Billy Wilder, they focused the American exhibition on the proliferation of domestic objects that were readily available to the average American. They had only seven months to plan the exhibition and construct the buildings. The pressure of designing exhibition pieces was immense, but there was also the potential for publicity. As George Nelson recalled, “On the one hand, glamour plus realization that the exhibition could have an important effect on U.S.-USSR relations. On the other, the possibility of wrecking the office by taking on too large a project: the Government as a client, plus an impossible time schedule, offers fascinating possibilities of exposure to a scandal-loving press, with congressional investigation as possible jackpot.”

Although the exhibition was advertised as an amiable cultural exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union, it played an essential role in President Eisenhower’s attempts to win the Cold War through American cultural information programs that propagated the United States as a country with unparalleled consumerism made available through capitalism. The American National Exhibition in Moscow sought to seduce Soviet citizens through attractive products that represented not only the higher standard of living available in the

United States, but also American culture, values, belief systems, and moral authority. Eisenhower hoped that Soviet citizens would see the great number of products unavailable to them and demand access to such products in their own country, providing the United States with the upper hand in the long-raging Cold War.

**The Eames Method**

The Eameses conceived the film as a seven-screen production that required the viewer to make connections between various images displayed simultaneously. The seven screens were arranged in two rows with four screens on the top and three screens centered directly below, creating diagonal lines between the upper and lower screens that would force the eye to look not only horizontally across screens, but also utilize the eye’s range of movement to quickly shift in many ways, focusing on each individual image before it changed moments later (Figure 26). The images changed at a relatively quick pace that coincided with the instrumental, upbeat music that accompanied the film. The format of the film and composition of images was heavily tested in the Eames Office with projectors to ensure the high quality of work associated with the Eameses’ name. The scale and layout of the screens within Buckminster Fuller’s dome was also extensively planned on a scaled model to perfect the placement of the screens; they needed to be located high above the

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108 Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, xi.
crowd and tilting downward so that everyone within the dome could watch the film without craning their necks or struggling to look over the people ahead of them.

Although the Eameses took the planning of their multi-screen film seriously, they could not resist the opportunity include illusionistic images that made them appear as giants when compared to the scaled cardboard figures that appeared throughout the space (Figure 27). At the same time, however, this photograph shows the Eameses’ hands on method. They not only tested the film by projecting the seven scenes onto a white wall, but they also built a model to visualize how the audience would physically interact with the space where their film was to be played. Utilizing their hands-on approach, the Eameses created a layout that would allow their film to have the greatest impact of the large Soviet audience, This was critically important, since the film was the Soviet visitor’s first image of American life upon entering the American National Exhibition.

A Sample Lesson

The American National Exhibition in Moscow was not the first time George Nelson called on the Eameses. Nelson played a crucial role in the Eameses’ career. He recommended them to the Herman Miller Furniture Company in 1946, granting them unhindered access to new technologies and the opportunity for mass production, distribution, and influence. The Eames’s affiliation with Herman Miller accelerated their rapid ascension to the highest ranks of design.109 Nelson also

109 Kirkham, Charles and Ray Eames, 372.
collaborated with Charles and Ray to produce an acclaimed multi-media presentation, referred to as “Art X” or the “Sample Lesson,” which described Nelson’s proposal for a new arts education policy and curriculum at the University of Georgia (Figure 28). The Eames’ concentrated on the film alongside Nelson and Alexander Girard, the founding director of Herman Miller’s fabric and textile division. All four inherited design ideals from Herbert Bayer as well as the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements, namely: breaking the sight plane, forcing the eye to constantly shift between image and text, and engaging with the information interactively.\(^{110}\) They shared, too, an intense concern for humanistic design that guides viewers to form links across disciplines to develop creativity and encourage innovation.

The Eameses’ use of imagery for educational purposes largely developed out of their toy production throughout the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, especially in the House of Cards. Influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and contemporary educational theories, the Eameses believed that toys should fuel childhood creativity.\(^{111}\) Charles felt that the educational system in the United States was seriously flawed; by focusing on specialization it failed to produce well-rounded adults that could think expansively and make abstract connections.\(^{112}\) Charles and Ray applied their design technique, learning through experimentation, to their toys

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\(^{111}\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 147.  
\(^{112}\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 381.
and added unique visual pleasures and relationships through use of color, texture, and detail.

Eames Pedagogy in Toys

The House of Cards was created in 1952 and consisted of fifty-two cards white cards featuring an asterisk on one side and a single image taken from the Eames’s vast collection of slides and photographs on the other (Figure 18). Charles and Ray selected everyday objects they believed embodied integrity: a close up of spools of thread, medication and vitamins, abstract and colorful patterns, toy trucks, dolls, vegetables, and many other everyday details. The Eameses included many images of objects that had stood the test of time and remained an essential part of everyday life as well as images that could not easily be dated to a passing trend, but would remain relevant for generations to come. Both Charles and Ray found interest in photography and film, as well as the ability of each medium to challenge the way people saw and interpreted the world around them. Many cards held images from the Eames House, including dolls and textiles, relating their work with images and media to their concept of functional design. Not only did the House of Cards proclaim the importance of details by including close ups of various objects and patterns, but it made combining images central to the toy’s purpose. Indeed, the cards encouraged children and adults to make connections between colors and textures by linking the cards and making three-dimensional structures. The House
of Cards allowed for freedom of experimentation, something the Eameses valued highly.\textsuperscript{113}

The Eameses created the House of Cards as a fun toy that made learning interesting and interactive. However, Charles and Ray took toy production very seriously. They remade foundational toys such as blocks, masks, cards, and tops that had stood the test of time and developed a range of skills while remaining enjoyable.\textsuperscript{114} The Eameses made the intended audience’s experience a priority and insisted that every toy create an enchanting, light-hearted experience that emphasizing intensive looking.

Using the “Sample Lesson” and House of Cards as models, the Eameses’ film for the Moscow exhibition employed similar techniques to educate Soviets on American values. They strategically placed images next to one another to present a day in the life of an average American. It began with distant shots of landscapes before moving to everyday activities and families interacting within their homes to establish an observable “norm.” The objects and images of American life selected by the Eameses echoed Cold War rhetoric; the luxuries of American domestic life justified the nation’s foreign policies. Indeed, domestic products are monumentally important to understanding the political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 147.
\textsuperscript{114} Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 146.
\textsuperscript{115} Castillo, \textit{Cold War on the Home Front}, 116.
American National Exhibition in Moscow

After World War II, the United States used American design, consumer products, and visual imagery to combat communism at world’s fairs and exhibitions throughout the early 1950s. The 1959 Exhibition occurred in a politically fraught moment, since the Soviets were developing atomic weaponry more quickly than the United States. Six weeks before the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, the Soviet National Exhibition opened in New York City. It showcased their technical advancements, focusing primarily on a model of Sputnik, the first satellite launched into the Earth’s orbit less than two years earlier. Displays on the Soviet launch of the first transcontinental missile asserted military prowess in order to illustrate Communism’s ability to compete with and surpass the capitalist countries of the West.

The United States countered the Soviet’s focus on space exploration and military weaponry with its emphasis on domesticity and the American high standard of living. On July 24, 1959 the American National Exhibition in Sokol’niki Park, Moscow opened to the Soviet public. Visitors were met with impressive buildings constructed specifically for this event as well as advanced technology and luxury goods. Buckminster Fuller’s dome was placed at the entrance, forcing visitors to enter the space before visiting subsequent exhibition halls and stands that held

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116 This is a gross generalization of Cold War politics, a topic this chapter and thesis are influenced by but is not the main concern in this chapter. For expanded literature on the Cold War and political tensions, please see Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.
117 Castillo, Cold War on the Home Front, 144.
the stars of the show: consumer goods (Figure 29). Soviet citizens walked through aisles and displays crowded with televisions, prepackaged foods, mail order catalogs, appliances, electronics, clothes, and countless other American products (Figure 30). Exhibitors bombarded visitors with pamphlets while companies such as Pepsi provided free samples to give the Soviets a taste of the American way of life.\textsuperscript{118} The American government sought to entice the Soviet citizens with products they claimed were available to every American, providing the people with a literal and metaphorical taste of the unparalleled standard of living in the United States.

The American press focused primarily on the kitchen of the display home nicknamed “Splitnik,” and it occasioned what has become one of the definitive events of the Cold War: the “Kitchen Debate.” In a model kitchen filled with the latest American appliances, Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev debated whether the average American citizen could own these items. Nixon emphasized that Americans could choose from countless options and products, luxuries not available to the Soviet public even if it had the economic means to purchase them. Through coverage in newspapers, magazines, and television programs, Americans witnessed Nixon standing up for the American way of life against a powerful communist nation, which also provided Nixon with a competitive edge in the upcoming presidential election.\textsuperscript{119} The Russian press argued that the model homes were exaggerations and that the average textile worker could not afford to live in one. Indeed, the home designed by George Nelson contained furniture produced by

\textsuperscript{118} Castillo, \textit{Cold War on the Home Front}, 151.

\textsuperscript{119} Castillo, \textit{Cold War on the Home Front}, 160.
Herman Miller and followed many of the design ideals championed in the Museum of Modern Art’s Good Design displays that were largely out of the financial reach of most Americans.\(^{120}\) While Splitnik was a more realistic version of the American home, the display was barely obtainable by the majority of expanding middle class.

**Glimpses of the U.S.A.**

When Charles Eames arrived in Moscow the day before the exhibition’s grand opening, only a select few had seen the multi-screen production during its completion in the Eames Office. Moreover, it remained untested in Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome where the seven expansive screens were housed. As the first stop in the exhibition, every visitor was greeted with the Eameses’ vision of the American story, displayed through relationships and contrasts that emphasized the diversity of the United States as well its relationships to the USSR (Figure 29).

Almost three million Soviets traveled through Fuller’s dome and watched Glimpses of the U.S.A. in the six weeks the exhibition was open.\(^{121}\) The multi-screen film began with images of a starry night, a scene visible from both the United States and the Soviet Union. The film continued with scenes of the American landscape in all its diversity, and then focused on images of neighborhoods taken from an aerial

\(^{120}\) Castillo estimates George Nelson’s model apartment was designed for a theoretical family that had an annual income of $12,000. The national average at this time was below $5,000, putting Nelson’s apartment well out of the reach of the working American. See Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 154.

\(^{121}\) Kaplan, Tigerman and Adamson, *California Design*, 313.
vantage point. Streets planned on grid lines gave way to pools, highways, industrial areas, urban landscapes, and regional architecture from across the fifty states. Highways and bridges illustrated America’s well-developed infrastructure, while various consumer products illustrated the nation’s high standard of living. Although American commodities and objects play a prominent role in the film, the primary focus is undoubtedly human interaction with the objects, with each other, and with their diverse surroundings. For example, the Eameses juxtaposed photographs of skyscrapers with people walking along urban streets, to show how Americans maneuvered through the city. The film also shows daily rituals performed by Americans: reading the morning newspaper, kissing their loved ones good-bye, and hurrying off to their various activities including work and school.

Although Marilyn Monroe had not yet reached fame in the Russia, the Eameses included a film clip of Monroe winking and blowing a kiss to the viewer. Their inclusion of her points to the gendering of products within the exhibition as a whole. Monroe, a highly sexualized feminine figure, underscores the feminization of the domestic space and the labor saving devices that made American women’s lives easier, allowing them to do less work and live the glamorous lifestyle represented by Monroe and made available through American capitalism.

At the conclusion of the film, the crowd left the dimly lit dome and entered into rows of consumer products and home displays (Figure 30). While the sheer amount and diversity of products was aimed to lure the Soviet visitors to a new vision of life under capitalism, the Eameses carefully manipulated images attempted
to pull at heartstrings, establishing a connection between Americans and Soviets. *Glimpses of the U.S.A.* encouraged visitors to leave the dome with a positive image of American life that relied on human interaction within the built environment. To put it differently, the film presented a way of life enabled by the countless products displayed in the subsequent exhibition halls, the majority of which were unattainable by the Soviet citizens. Viewed alone, this reminded the Soviets of American superiority. However, the Eameses were careful to emphasize the human element in relation to these objects, establishing a connection between the strong sense of family life throughout America and the commercial goods that enabled the home to be a comfortable place in which to retreat and relax.

In creating *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, the Eameses and their staff utilized many of the same processes they used for their previous films, exhibitions, toys, and furniture designs. They carefully planned the visual juxtapositions through extensive experimentation. A photograph from 1968 shows Charles and Ray bending over a light table, looking at slides through a magnifying glass and rearranging them into groups (Figure 31). Each image and every composition was painstakingly selected and created, especially by Ray who was known for her insistence on perfection in every aspect of Eames.¹²² Charles spoke openly about their design process, explaining some of the decisions they made in the production of the film:

“*We wanted to have a credible number of images, but not so many that they couldn’t be scanned in the time allotted. At the same time,*

the number of images had to be large enough so that people wouldn’t be exactly sure how many things they had seen. We arrived at the number seven. With four images, you always knew there were four, but by the time you got up to eight images you weren’t quite sure. They were very big images – the width across four of them was half the length of a football field... We tried out various tricks and rhythms in changing the images. We discovered that if you had seven images and changed one of them, this put an enormously wasteful, non-informative burden on the brain, because with every change the eye had to check every image to see which one had changed. When you’re busy checking you don’t absorb information.”

In *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, the Eameses relied on many of the educational techniques they emphasized in their multi-media presentation at the University of Georgia, including the juxtaposition of image, text, and sound to give the audience a multi-sensory experience that concretized abstract ideas. The seven screens broke visual planes, utilizing the mobility of the eye and forcing the viewers to be constantly stimulated by information. As the images changed on the screens simultaneously, the audience would quickly scan all of the information present in the various screens before being assailed by a new series of images that represented American everyday life, but in a slightly varied way. For example, the Eameses showed the varied natural landscape of the United States through the combination of distant shots of deserts, mountains, rivers and a few details present within those areas such as animals and plants before quickly shifting to the suburban landscape that was largely unvaried. This allows the viewer to deduce that suburban life was a standard across the United States, regardless of the region. In an attempt to pack as much information into the twelve-minute film as possible, the

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Eameses overloaded the film with rapidly changing images and clips to tell a full and visually interesting story of the American way of life while keeping their message accessible to a wide variety of individuals. The Soviet visitors were dwarfed by the seven large screens that overpowered viewers with size and a proliferation of images.

In *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, the Eames Office chose images and film clips that broke from the emphasis of much of the exhibition in Moscow. While their film focused on American products and advancements, they provided a human element that gave a more complete and relatable vision of American life than household appliances displayed in an elite and glamorous kitchen. Typically credited to Ray’s genius, the end of the multi-screen film consisted of short clips of individuals saying “good night,” which provided a more personal and sentimental conclusion to the film than if they were saying “good bye” (Figure 31). Going to bed, lovingly wishing family members and friends farewell before reacquainting in the morning is a universal ritual performed nightly by people around the world.\(^{124}\)

The final scene blacked out all but the bottom center screen, which focused on a bowl of forget-me-nots, a flower that has a strong use in folklore and represents remembrance, faithfulness, and enduring love (Figure 32). The flower held similar meaning to the Soviets at the American National Exhibition and ended the presentation on a note of friendship.\(^ {125}\) Ray chose the flower over a clip of a jet taking off, leading towards a more progressive future, which emphasizes the Charles

\(^{124}\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 324.

\(^{125}\) Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 324.
and Ray’s commitment to humanistic aspects in their designs and exhibitions and Ray’s continuing important contributions that made the distinction between “very good” and “Eames.” The flower proved to be a successful close to the film, providing a moving visual as opposed to the jet, which would have aligned the film with the Soviet’s emphasis on technological superiority at their exhibition in New York. The Eameses decided to take the focus off of Cold War technologies and advancements that created tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, a tension that was emphasized by the American press that similarly used images to emphasize a point: communism was a threat to American life. Contrastingly, the Eameses found images that established strong bonds cross-culturally that provided information about the American lifestyle through details, which the Eameses found to be the most important aspect of universal everyday life.

In an interview years later, Ray Eames remembered Glimpses of the U.S.A. and the American National Exhibition in Moscow experience to be a very “affective.” Her description was apt; according to Kirkham, their film’s universal message

126 Neuhart, Neuhart, and Eames, Eames Design, 10.
127 According to Carpenter, Charles proposed a jet taking off while Ray was responsible for the choice of the flower. Carpenter, “Tribute to Charles Eames,” p. 32.
128 Ray Eames often quoted her husband, Charles stating, “The details are not details – they make the product. It is, in the end, these details that give the product life.” Quoted in, Doris Saatchi, “All about Eames,” House and Garden, February 1984, 129.
caused countless to leave the dome mystified and teary-eyed.\textsuperscript{130} The Eameses’ design was careful never to challenge socialism, but to uplift the American way of life in a country that had an uneasy relationship with the United States over the last decade.\textsuperscript{131}

The Eameses were well aware of not only the affect, but of the effect \textit{Glimpses of the U.S.A.} could have on how individuals experienced the subsequent exhibits that boasted the higher standard of living in the United States and formed a picture of the American cultural identity through their commodities.\textsuperscript{132} Although the government and George Nelson did not closely censured the production of the film, it is probable that Masey, Nelson, Wilder, and the Eameses meticulously arranged the flow of the exhibition with the “affective” film placed at the beginning to allow Russians to connect with the American lifestyle before revealing the preeminence of the United States as the overwhelming world leader in the production of consumer goods. In this way, the film is a critical element of the propaganda, since it translates consumer abundance to human happiness and connection.

The 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow was conceived as an attempt to encourage cultural communication and understanding. When taken on its own, the Eameses’ attempt to create similarities between the United States and the Soviet Union to emphasize human interaction to create empathy within the film.

\textsuperscript{130} Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 323.
\textsuperscript{131} Kirkham, \textit{Charles and Ray Eames}, 372.
"Glimpses of the U.S.A" underscored that the American way of life was predicated of family life and domestic production while retaining the appropriate focus on capitalist politics. The film, thus, reveals the Eameses goal in creating a compassionate view of the United States that made the Soviet visitors more vulnerable to the barrage of American domestic products that followed in the rest of the exhibition.
Conclusion

As World War II came to a close in 1945, materials such as plywood and steel became more readily available for domestic consumption. With the goal of creating inexpensive, high-quality furniture that utilized the latest wartime developments, Charles and Ray Eames produced their first chair design, the Molded Plywood Chair (1945-1946). The Eameses believed that thin, molded plywood would be the best material for creating affordable and durable modern furniture. At the end of their long careers, their target audience had largely changed from the average, middle-class American to corporate patrons and government institutions. The couple no longer experimented with plywood or fiberglass, but focused their attention on films and exhibitions designed to educate the public. As the Eameses’ career progressed, so did their use and control of images. Charles and Ray Eames became increasingly conscious of not only the way their products were portrayed, but also the public reception of their relationship, working methods, and ideologies of design and space. A visual tension formed between the ways the Eameses represented themselves and how the American media portrayed their work and relationship.

In the postwar period, the domestic environment defined American ideals at home and abroad. As Thomas Hine argues in his book, *Populuxe*, “Individual citizens had, they were told, freedom to express themselves and live on a level of comfort of which all mankind, up to that moment, could scarcely have dared to dream.”53 This ideal became a rallying cry for the American middle-class and for the American

foreign policy. As Hine persuasively argues, the “ability to have so great a choice of things to buy was viewed as fulfillment of the promise of democracy.”

The glamour associated with the American way of life was highly gendered, since the domestic sphere was women’s domain. Although women were not largely present within the workplace, they were considered the primary consumers and decision makers within the home. However, as revealed through the public presentation of the Eameses’ designs, media such as NBC’s Home show and Herman Miller ads, promoted the designs as largely masculine coming from the office of Charles Eames. The Eameses challenged traditional conceptions of American glamour ideas in their work and in their lifestyle.

Popular media including magazines and television shows such as Vogue, Life, and Home allowed for myriad interpretations of the Eameses’ work and targeted the upper-middle classes. These sources had strong reader and viewership, influencing the ideas of millions of individuals who sought to obtain the idealistic lifestyles they depicted. The Eameses were well aware of the power media had upon reception of their relationship and products and sought to control this, as evidenced by their increasing use of images to convey ideals. Their products were interpreted in varied ways that aligned it with the highly gendered American conception of glamour. However, as a couple that worked and lived together, the Eameses’ challenged the gender divisions so central to the American way of life.

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134 Hine, Populuxe, 36.
The gendering of their work applied to their complex relationship and how the public interpreted it. As the interview during the 1956 *Home* show illustrates, Ray was frequently overlooked and under credited as the supporting wife of an ambitious and successful male designer. This interpretation of their relationship concerned Charles, who constantly credited Ray in their designs and advocated her vital role. The view of their relationship was heavily influenced by the time; men were seen as providers while women stayed within the domestic sphere. However, their individual interests and responsibilities within their working relationship also influence this misinterpretation. Charles was the public image, more comfortable with public speaking and taking care of administrative duties around the Eames Office. Ray shied away from these aspects of their work and involved herself more heavily with the design process. Ray made large advances in an era of limited opportunities for women and recent scholarship informed by feminism has attempted to resituate and credit her for her valuable input.

The images also highlight the Eameses’ unique lifestyle and abilities in using design to influence and represent American values at a pivotal time in the country’s history. Americans were seeking ways in which to define themselves and the Eameses provided the medium, whether through their humanistic furniture designs or their images that characterized the nature of American life. However, as I have argued, the Eameses’ lifestyle hardly represented that of the average American, creating a necessary tension between how they represented themselves, how their products were marketed, and how both were received and interpreted by the
masses that were influenced by popular media which placed common gender prejudices and conceptions upon their work and their relationship. The gendering of the American way of life, embodied in the visual presentation of the Eameses’ designs was challenged by the Eameses’ personal relationship and professional partnership. The Eameses’ increasing control over the presentation of their work creates a dynamic tension between American masculine design, feminized glamour, and their relationship that largely challenged typical definitions of American glamour.
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Figure 21. Herman Miller Advertising, “It’s a Man’s Chair,” 1957. Reproduced in: Martin P. Eidelberg, The Eames Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Art Museum, 2006), 120.
Figure 22. Herman Miller Advertising, “Even if you don’t have two o’clock feeding at your house, we think you will appreciate the deep comfort of this rosewood and leather lounge chair designed by Charles Eames for Herman Miller,” 1959. Reproduced in: Martin P. Eidelberg, The Eames Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Art Museum, 2006), 117.
Figure 25. Interior view of the Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome, 1959.
Reproduced in: John Neuhart, Marilyn Neuhart, and Ray Eames, Eames Design: The
1989), 238.