

An Introduction to Appraising Mid-Century Modern Furniture

by Sarah Reeder, ISA

An Introduction to Appraising Mid-Century Modern Furniture

As the market for mid-century modern furniture grows in popularity, appraisers will increasingly encounter mid-century modern items in their assignments that are worthy of appraisal. This article aims to provide a brief introduction to mid-century modern furniture and equip non-specialist appraisers with a body of basic information to better prepare them for inspecting and evaluating mid-century modern pieces in their future assignments. The emphasis will be on furniture as mid-century modern decorative arts and fine art are varied and complex fields deserving of their own articles. Included will be an overview of the historical context of the modern movement, Danish Modern furniture, American mid-century modern furniture, and a discussion of some of the most commonly occurring mid-century modern furniture designs in appraisal assignments.

Mid-century modern has been one of my scholarly passions since I attended the 1999 exhibition “The World of Charles and Ray Eames” at the Library of Congress. Since that pivotal moment I have spent years developing my knowledge of this era to become a specialist in mid-century modern and 20th century design and I am still learning every day. It is an exhaustive, ever-evolving topic where many resources are still surfacing to scholarly attention. The following are general tips to help guide appraisers who encounter mid-century modern pieces in their appraisal assignments to help them identify if they have competency or what steps they need to take to acquire competency.

The scope of this article is far from comprehensive, and I urge readers that when in doubt, they should consult with an appraiser who is a specialist in this area. This period can be very tricky as frequently pieces are unmarked or have lost their original labels and fakes and later versions of the same design proliferate. Due to their continued popularity, some designs remain in licensed production to this day. While the newer pieces

are still authentic, they occupy a market that is distinct from examples produced in the 1950s and 1960s and identifying the age of the piece being examined and the corresponding appropriate market to search for comparables is very important. Complicating matters further, unlike objects from many earlier design eras, it can sometimes be extremely difficult to get a sense if a piece is special just from studying the quality of construction or appearance. The \$300 piece may look very similar to the \$30,000 piece, and both may be unmarked. Careful research is critical.

This article is solely about furniture that exhibits characteristics of the mid-century modern aesthetic vocabulary and does not include all furniture produced in the mid-century era such as 1950s Kittinger and Henredon pieces inspired by older furniture traditions. The discussion also focuses exclusively on Danish Modern and American mid-century modern designs and does not address the rich body of work produced in other countries such as 20th century Italian design. I have selected this scope of work to center on the areas of the field that will be most commonly encountered by appraisers working in North America to maximize the utility of my observations to readers.

Origins of the Modern Movement

The beginning roots of the modern movement can be traced back into the 19th century and the Arts & Crafts Movement philosophies of William Morris (English, 1834-1896), who criticized excessive ornamentation, ascribed a social purpose to design, and advanced the concepts of the designer as craftsman and the unity of all the arts. In the introduction to the excellent book *Modernism 1914-1939: Designing a New World*, Christopher Wilk defines modernism in the context of design as “not conceived as a style, but was a loose collection of ideas. It was a term that covered a range of movements and styles in many countries, especially those flourishing in key cities in Germany and Holland, as well as Moscow, Paris, Prague and, later, New York. All of these sites were stages for an espousal of the new and, often, an equally vociferous rejection of history and tradition; a utopian desire to create a better world, to reinvent the world from scratch; an almost messianic belief in the power and potential of the machine and industrial

technology... a rejection of applied ornament and decoration; an embrace of abstraction... and a belief in the unity of all the arts – that is, an acceptance that traditional hierarchies that separated the practices of art and design, as well as those that detached the arts from life, were unsuitable for a new era. All of these principles were frequently combined with social and political beliefs (largely left-leaning) that held that design and art could, and should, transform society.”¹ It is not a coincidence that the book’s dates start the year after the 1913 Armory Show in New York City. As Wilk discusses, the modern zeitgeist included many artistic disciplines. The psychological aftereffects of the First World War also contributed to the idea that the old ways of life were over and new, better models needed to be created incorporating a social purpose to design, such as plans for housing developments that included design features specifically intended to reduce the spread of disease common in crowded traditional tenements.

The rise of Hitler and the resulting exodus of refugees from the European architecture and design communities spread the style of modernism throughout the globe and in the post World War II years commercial manufacturers popularized the aesthetic of modernism, although usually by then stripped of its earlier philosophical mission. What we now think of as mid-century modern occurred during the period in the modern movement’s evolution when these designs, some of which had already been in existence for decades, ceased to be the avant-garde experiments of artists and intellectuals and transformed into the commercially popular, mass-produced style present in the average person’s living room.

Danish Modern

While sharing many stylistic characteristics with mid-century modern furniture from other countries, Danish Modern is often considered a distinct subset of the movement. Major designers included Hans Wegner, Finn Juhl, Alvar Aalto, Ole Wanscher, Arne Jacobsen, Peter Hvidt, Ib Kofod-Larsen, and Borge Mogensen and there was a large and diverse group of manufacturers. When conducting online research in this area it is always a good idea to try multiple variations of spelling in your keyword searches, including intentionally misspelling the names to make sure you capture all the records

available. I have a wonderful book on Danish Modern furniture in my reference library written in 1956 by Esbjørn Hiort which allows us to travel back together in time and listen to a Danish voice in the movement describe how they considered their work in the global design canon: “Furniture, today, plays a leading role in the sphere of modern design in Denmark. While earlier it was mainly Danish porcelain and silver which upheld the reputation of Danish applied art abroad, today it is first and foremost Danish furniture which arouses interest. What is the reason for this? It is often claimed that it is the *quality* of Danish furniture which makes it so highly prized. But quality is compounded of many ingredients and it is a particularly complicated conception when applied to articles of daily use. Practical, aesthetic, and economic considerations are all involved, and the quality of the individual article is dependent on a nice balance of all three. Therefore, to understand what it is that determines the high standard of modern Danish furniture, it is necessary to examine the principles on which modern furniture design is based. A piece of furniture is, above all, a utilitarian article: the chair to sit on, the table at which to eat or work, the bed to sleep in, the cupboard to hold our various possessions. Their design must be adapted to our way of life if the things are to serve our needs. When the social aspect of architecture and home furnishing became important during the nineteen-twenties, the basis of the design of furniture had to be changed. Where, earlier, stress had been laid on *show*, the emphasis was now transferred to *utility* and *comfort*. Homes became smaller and the economic factor began to play a more important role than heretofore.... The demand for furniture for show was, therefore, superseded by an urgent call for practical furniture in a reasonable price-range, and at the same time the predilection for furniture in suites was replaced by a preference for individual pieces which made possible a freer and more personal style of furnishing.”²

Commonly Encountered Danish Modern Designs

The Ubiquitous Danish Modern Sideboard:

Sometimes it seems that every home with mid-century modern furnishings has at least one Danish Modern sideboard. Be very careful! While

this form shares many similar stylistic characteristics, certain models can be quite valuable. It is important to dedicate sufficient time to do research to attempt to identify the maker or consult with a specialist. Depending on the assignment, it may be more cost-effective for you to collaborate with an expert rather than spend hours of your own time researching an item.

So where does the non-specialist appraiser begin when an appraisal assignment includes a Danish Modern sideboard? It depends on how much information is encoded within the piece itself. If one is really lucky there will be some manner of manufacturer identification in the form of a label, stamp, or brand. Pieces from this era were most frequently labeled in a few areas: a stamp on the back of the sideboard, in a metal tag affixed to the side of a drawer (I see them most often in the inside of one of the outermost top drawers), or in a impressed burnt brand inside a drawer or on the back panel of the sideboard. Sometimes there will still be an extant paper label but this is not as frequent. The names of the individual designers are rarely on the labels. Usually it is just the name of the corporation or the corporation's monogram and additional research is needed to determine the designer and history of that model. For example, a "FH" stamp on a piece needs to be expanded with further research and verification to identify it as the mark of the manufacturer Fritz Hansen, and then the characteristics of the item bearing that mark need to be compared against the historical record of Fritz Hansen designs to identify that the piece was (for example) designed by Hans Wegner for Fritz Hansen.

A good item description should also include the name or number of the particular model if applicable and a date of design or production. Tracking down this vintage manufacturing information can be challenging for the smaller companies that have not received as much scholarly attention and documentation. I have a large collection of vintage mid-century manufacturer catalogs in my reference library that are immensely useful to me for identifying the more obscure examples and their accompanying model numbers and documentation. Another helpful area to consult is the myriad group of mid-century modern collector blogs and websites scattered across the internet. While they cannot be considered reputable or credible sources of information for an appraisal, members of this community are active in

digitizing and sharing vintage manufacturer catalogs and scans of other archival information that is often not currently available from more traditional academic outlets. I have found the vintage advertisement database on this site to be very useful in my research <http://www.danish-modern.co.uk> The appraiser must always view these resources very critically but they should not be overlooked as a potential tool to locate primary source material about the manufacturers and designers.

Most sideboards were constructed of teak or rosewood. Manufacturers also sometimes offered the same model with two finish options of either teak or rosewood, with the latter selling at a higher price point. Some models were made of solid wood but it is more common to see examples with a veneer finish. The veneer is fragile and frequently has condition issues that impact value as collectors in the top tiers for this era look for superb condition. It is especially important when searching for comparables of this object type to locate examples in similar condition.

Many Danish Modern pieces are marked “Danish Furniture Makers Control.” Don’t get too excited! Danish Furniture Makers Control was not a company but rather was a control organization formed in 1959 to establish and promote quality standards. Many Danish Modern manufacturers belonged to the organization and included the stamp or brand on their pieces in addition to their own labels to demonstrate to customers that the item had met stringent quality standards.

Complicating matters further for research of Danish Modern furniture is that the literature is often not in English. The Chrome browser’s translating options are excellent for conducting internet research on topics where the scholarship and associated documentation is in a foreign language. I have become extremely fond of Google Translate and use it to liberate me to contact experts for research-related inquiries throughout the world. I once used it successfully both to write an email in Finnish and read the subsequent response in Finnish, the contents of which provided me with exactly the information I needed. Don’t be shy about leaping over the language barrier.

If you are very fortunate and there is still some sort of identification on the piece, the best place to start is with a general internet search of

“*[whatever the label says]* sideboard” (you can then switch sideboard for the search terms “buffet” or “console” and also try adding the additional terms “Danish Modern”). If the label is just a monogram or image rather than a name, the manufacturer’s identity must first be identified. From the results you can study images and glean more information about possible model numbers or designer associations to then subsequently use as search terms in a more industry specific database such as your preferred subscription price database. This general-to-specific research strategy will help you efficiently sort through results.

Imagine that you find yourself inspecting a piece that bears no manufacturer labels, stamps, or brands. What should the appraiser do in this instance? If it is not a model I immediately recognize I head to Google Images and start playing with keywords. It can take several campaigns of varying my keywords and scrolling down through the results but this approach is both my favorite and most successful starting place in my research toolkit. I switch over to more specialized resources for the later steps of my research but with well-considered keywords Google Images can be extremely effective. Look carefully at the piece you are researching. Does it have a particular detail in the design of its legs? What are the drawer pulls like? Are there interior shelves or drawers inside a cabinet? Small details in the configuration of the drawers and storage areas are often the key to identifying a certain Danish Modern design and can be incorporated into keyword searches. I also like using the 1stdibs website as a visual directory for my initial searches (<https://www.1stdibs.com>). The accuracy and quality of item descriptions on 1stdibs can vary wildly but the site functions well as a rudimentary visual database for quickly scanning images of many examples of an object type while attempting to identify a piece or a designer in an appraisal assignment. Danish Modern sideboards and their close relative, the Ubiquitous Danish Modern Coffee Table, are among the most difficult forms to discern quality and potential importance from readily identifiable visual characteristics as most examples exhibit the same materials and the same construction techniques and a large part of the value comes from the designer attribution or design history. Do not discount a piece as trivial without conducting further research.

Hans Wegner Wishbone Chair for Carl Hansen & Son:

This much-loved design has been copied by everyone from White on White to Crate and Barrel and the original manufacturer Carl Hansen & Son still produces licensed versions of this chair today. Inspired by a painting of Dutch merchants sitting in Ming chairs, in the 1940s Hans Wegner (Danish, 1914-2007) began a series of chairs incorporating elements from the form of Chinese chairs. He designed the Wishbone Chair in 1949 and Carl Hansen & Son has been manufacturing it since 1950.³ The Wishbone Chair is an excellent example of how complicated the design histories of items from this era can be. While commonly known as the “Wishbone Chair,” this model was also known as “Y” and “CH-24.” Even the manufacturer’s name is not straightforward. While the Wishbone Chair was, and is, produced by Carl Hansen & Son, Hans Wegner also created designs for the manufacturer Fritz Hansen, which is an entirely distinct company and should not be confused or conflated with Carl Hansen & Son.

Be very suspicious if you encounter an unlabeled piece that appears to be a Wishbone Chair. While labeling conventions have changed over time, the chair should still have some sort of Carl Hansen identification. On older models I most frequently see a branded mark on the bottom of the seat. There are a plethora of fakes and reproductions on the market, including some that are very close in proportion and appearance (Norwegian authorities recently made international news by seizing and destroying a shipment of 100 fake versions of a different Hans Wegner design imported into the country⁴). Look carefully at the construction details. Have all elements been executed meticulously? If not, you are likely inspecting a knockoff. If the curved top rail is not one solid piece of bent wood then you are definitely dealing with a reproduction. The Wishbone Chair’s top rail is made of a single curved piece of steam-bent wood.

American Mid-Century Modern

American mid-century modern design was imbued with a European flavor. The influx of European designers, architects, and artists immigrating to America in response to the rise of Hitler had a profound impact on the

development of the American design scene. Many of the designers we associate with American mid-century modern design were in fact German, Finnish, and Hungarian in origin but spent the latter half of their lives working in the United States. Frequently designers in this era were also architects and toggled seamlessly between the two disciplines (I have multiple, distinct books in my reference library titled “Furniture by Architects”). A number of key designers also served in posts at academic institutions, which further disseminated the philosophies of modernism to a new generation of American students. Eliel Saarinen (Finnish, 1873-1950) and his son Eero Saarinen (Finnish, 1910-1961) were at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, which is where Americans Charles and Ray Eames of the Eames Office first met and Florence Knoll of Knoll Furniture studied. Marcel Breuer (Hungarian, 1902-1981) and Walter Gropius (German, 1883-1969) taught at Harvard. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (German, 1886-1969) headed the architecture school at the Illinois Institute of Technology. American George Nakashima’s (1905-1990) design philosophies were deeply shaped by his years spent studying and working abroad.

The two biggest American furniture companies of the mid-century modern era were Herman Miller and Knoll. While there were many smaller companies in the marketplace, these two were responsible for producing the majority of designs we are familiar with today and worked with many individual firms (the Eames Office, George Nelson Associates, etc.) to manufacture and market their designs on a mass commercial scale. Both companies are still in existence and have detailed documentation on their corporate websites about the specifications and production histories of their inventory. The recently published *Knoll Textiles, 1945-2010* book is also a wonderful resource for identifying and dating vintage Knoll upholstery fabrics.⁵

Commonly Encountered American Designs

Eames Lounge Chair, Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller:

The Eames Lounge Chair was first released by Herman Miller in 1956 and remains in production today. Numerous changes have been made to the construction and materials through the years, most notably the 1991

disappearance of classic rosewood veneer for the frame following Herman Miller's decision to discontinue the use of rainforest hardwoods in the construction of the Eames Lounge.⁶ Lounge chairs are generally well marked with Herman Miller tags to the underside of chairs and accompanying ottomans although a number of knockoffs by other manufacturers exist, such as a vintage copy by Plycraft and contemporary unauthorized reproductions. In addition to the Herman Miller tags, a genuine Eames Lounge chair can usually be readily identified by the extreme quality of its construction and the graceful lines of its execution, which are not present in its imitators.

Scholarship about the designs of the Eames Office is ongoing and complex; currently there are a variety of academic opinions regarding who were the major contributors to the design output of the Eames Office. This is a very large topic best saved for a future article, but a takeaway of use to non-specialist appraisers is that it is no longer considered acceptable to attribute all designs from the Eames Office as solely the work of Charles Eames (1907-1978). The most common current practice within the mid-century modern scholarly community is to catalog works as by Charles and Ray Eames (ie "Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller"), with the caveat that the Eames Office was a design studio in the Renaissance workshop tradition full of many talented designers who all made important, sometimes uncredited contributions to the work of the Eames Office.

Writing from the perspective of someone who has conducted extensive research in Ray Eames' personal papers and maintained a scholarly interest in her life and work for many years, I'd like to make public service announcement on behalf of Ray (1912-1988) to correct a widespread misunderstanding: Ray Eames was not a man. Moreover, she was not the brother of Charles Eames, and there were no "brothers Eames." (Yes, I've heard all of the above before). Ray Eames was a woman, a painter who studied with Hans Hofmann in New York City, a sculptor, and a graphic designer who created covers for the journal *Arts & Architecture*, as well as being active in many other creative disciplines. She married Charles Eames in 1941 and was a founding member of the Eames Office. Ray was not even her actual name. She was born Bernice Alexandra Kaiser and started

going by Ray (which was adapted from her childhood nickname) in her youth, an intriguingly ambiguous name that served her well with male art critics when she was exhibiting paintings in New York in the 1930s.

Barcelona Chair, Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, produced by Knoll:

I have seen more fake Barcelona Chairs in my career than real ones. While relatively easy to identify in an on-site inspection, it can be much more difficult to spot the signs of a knockoff in a photograph. This is a form where it is really best to carefully examine the piece in person. There is extensive literature online and in the collector community about the characteristics of a correct Barcelona Chair. Obviously, the presence of Knoll labels is always a good start. Furthermore, there are a number of specific details about the chair's construction including the upholstery techniques and the number of straps supporting the cushions that are indicative of a correct chair. The leather upholstery is made up of forty individual panels cut from a single cowhide and seventeen straps are used to support the cushions. This is a form where quality counts. In person you will likely be able to discern the differences between a real and fake Barcelona Chair in details such as the execution of the upholstery, the quality of the leather, and the feel of the frame. Dimensions are also important. Design Within Reach's schematic diagrams are a great tool for checking the dimensions of the item being appraised against the standard recorded measurements <http://www.dwr.com/product/barcelona-chair.do?sortBy=ourPicks> Researching comparables can be difficult as many chairs sold as a "Barcelona Chair" in the price databases are knockoff versions. It is important to closely study the pictures of your comparables and compare them against the descriptions.

The Barcelona Chair is technically not an American design although it has become widely associated with the American manufacturer Knoll. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (German, 1886-1968) designed the German Pavilion for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, Spain. The chair was originally designed to furnish the Pavilion and was reportedly created with the intention to be a seat worthy of the king and queen of

Spain. Mies drew from the lines of campaign chairs used in the classical Rome, stating, “I feel that it must be possible to harmonize the old and new in our civilization.”⁷ Over two decades later in 1953 the designer granted production rights for the 1929 Pavilion chairs to his friend Florence Knoll, and the Barcelona Chair and Ottoman have remained in continuous production by Knoll ever since. When writing the item description in your appraisals, make sure you note the nuance of the gap between the design’s original creation and the beginning of its commercial production. The Barcelona Chair is not “Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for Knoll,” but rather “Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe [for the German Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, Spain], Produced by Knoll.”

There is some confusion about how to refer to the designer other than his full extended name. The common practice used by his scholars is to call him “Mies,” which was his surname. If you are discussing the designer by name in the body of your appraisal, call him Mies. He is an excellent example of the overlap and influence between European and American design following the rise of the Hitler in the 1930s. German-born Mies spent the first fifty-two years of his life in Europe and by 1930 was director of the pioneering Bauhaus School. Mies came to America in 1938 and went on to create a highly influential legacy in the American design and architecture community, especially through his role as head of the architecture school at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Wassily Chair designed by Marcel Breuer, produced by Knoll:

The Wassily Chair shares many common elements of its design biography with the Barcelona Chair. Both were designed in the 1920s by European modernists associated with the Bauhaus School who later immigrated to America and both chairs were popularized on a commercial scale in America much later after their production rights were acquired by Knoll. Marcel Breuer (Hungarian, 1902-1981) was a designer at the Bauhaus School when he created what later became known as the Wassily Chair in 1925. Inspired by the bent steel tubes of bicycle handlebars, the chair was called B 3 for much of its existence but was renamed “Wassily Chair” in 1962 in a (very successful) rebranding attempt by Italian design company Gavina SpA.

The name was inspired by the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, who was a colleague of Breuer's at the Bauhaus School and an early proponent of the design. Breuer left Germany for England in 1935 following Nazi persecution of those associated with the Bauhaus School and moved to America in 1937 to teach as a professor at Harvard and work with Bauhaus School founder Walter Gropius. In 1946 Breuer formed his own architecture firm in New York and later went on to design the Whitney Museum. Knoll did not produce the Wassily Chair until 1968 when the company acquired Gavina SpA, which previously owned the rights to the Wassily Chair and several other designs by Breuer. In the same manner as the Barcelona Chair, remember to reflect the distinction between design and production credits when writing the item description: "Wassily Chair designed by Marcel Breuer, produced by Knoll."

Wassily Chairs are widely copied and due care must be afforded during inspection on an assignment to ascertain whether the chair is correct. There are many tips for identifying a correct chair, the most important being that the frame should be made of seamless stainless steel with no joints. Take precise measurements of the chair being inspected and compare them to the documented Knoll specifications. Pre-Knoll versions of the chair are rarely encountered but do exist. The Vitra Design Museum contains an early model of B 3 in their collection, produced in 1926-1927 by Standard Möbel Lengyel & Co., Berlin which was a company consisting of Breuer, Kálmán Lengyel, and Anton Lorenz. Thonet bought Standard Möbel in 1929 and only produced a modified version of the chair for two more years. In 1962 Gavina relaunched production under the new "Wassily" name until the company was acquired by Knoll six years later.⁸

Eero Saarinen Pedestal Table for Knoll:

While commonly known as the "Tulip Table," this design was also part of what was called the Pedestal Collection for Knoll and is sometimes referred to as an "Eero Saarinen Pedestal Table" or "Eero Saarinen Dining Table." It is good to keep all keywords in mind when conducting your comparable research. After five years of development working on the

concept to “eliminate the slum of legs” in furniture, Saarinen’s design debuted at Knoll in 1957 as part of the cohesive “Pedestal Collection.”

In recent years Ikea’s knockoff version of this table has graced many dwellings, supplemented with a wide variety of higher end replicas. During the mid-century period the manufacturer Burke made an adapted version of the tulip table which can be confusing as they exhibit a similar level of patina but Burke knockoffs are clearly identifiable in person, both by the lower quality and difference in scale and construction. A correct Knoll table base is made of a single piece of cast aluminum and it attaches to the table top with a single threaded rod. There should not be any visible screws on inspection unless the table is fully turned upside down. The table top is gently beveled to form a tapered edge in contrast to many replica models with flat edges. Knoll tables are produced with both round and oval table tops in a range of sizes and table top finishes. Older tables may no longer have labels so checking the dimensions and studying the construction techniques is critical. This is a design where the age of production has an impact on value and it is necessary to determine if it is a 1960s or 1990s example to conduct appropriate comparable research. The series of questions appraisers must ask themselves when inspecting a tulip table is similar to the process of inspecting a possible Old Master print: Is it right? If it’s right, is it an early or late production? Is it the basic model, or one with additional value features (such as a marble rather than laminate top)? What are the condition issues? What is the provenance? (A purchase record or clear chain of title within the client’s family can be very helpful for older models). Due to the high purchase price for new licensed Knoll tables, examples with condition issues are still of interest in the marketplace. Don’t dismiss one just because of damaged condition without conducting further research.

George Nakashima Furniture

It is important for appraisers to know that pieces by George Nakashima (1905-1990) were not always signed. Your client may have provenance information or a vintage receipt, but in some cases it may be helpful to contact the Nakashima Foundation. George Nakashima’s

daughter Mira Nakashima offers a paid authentication process through the Nakashima Foundation that locates and prepares a copy of the item's original order in the Foundation's records and also provides a letter of authentication signed by Mira Nakashima. The Foundation also offers a "replacement cost valuation" service which can be useful for appraisers <https://www.nakashimafoundation.org/spirit/contribute/donate/3>

Depending on the circumstances of the appraisal assignment it may be appropriate to discuss these options with your client. The process of obtaining documentation from the Nakashima Foundation can be lengthy so if you are working on an appraisal assignment with a tight time frame it is best to submit the application early on. Many Nakashima pieces encountered on assignments will frequently have a clear chain of provenance but this may change as time goes on and more pieces leave the families they were commissioned for and enter the secondary market.

George Nakashima's work has inspired subsequent generations of studio furniture designers yet his own pieces are usually easy to distinguish in person from the many Nakashima-influenced designs that followed. Most established studio furniture artisans active today sign their own work and "Nakashima-style" unidentified pieces generally do not measure up in person to the purity of form and craftsmanship in correct Nakashima furniture. It is important to note that Nakashima's designs did evolve stylistically through the course of his career and as his business became more financially successful. Seek out specialist help and the resources of the Nakashima Foundation if necessary for your appraisal assignment.

Conclusion

Mid-century modern furniture is a challenging but deeply rewarding area of study. There are few eras of design history that exhibited such innovation and explosively creative interplay between designers, architects, and artists from all over the world. It can be a very difficult era for appraisers that requires careful research and consultation with specialists, but new scholarship is continually being accomplished and will aid in our investigations of this fascinating period.

About the Author

Sarah Reeder, ISA is the owner of Artifactual History Appraisal and is a personal property appraiser based in the Washington, D.C. area. She is a specialist in mid-century modern and 20th century design and also appraises fine art, silver, ceramics, antiques, and decorative arts.

Ms. Reeder is a Member of the International Society of Appraisers, a Candidate for Accredited Membership in the Appraisers Association of America, and a graduate of New York University's Program in Appraisal Studies in Fine & Decorative Arts. She received her master's and undergraduate degrees from the College of William & Mary, where she also completed the Certificate Program in Museum Studies, Material Culture, and Early American History from the National Institute of American History and Democracy. She can be reached at info@afhappraisal.com or at 703-543-2567. Please feel free to contact her with research inquiries and questions about mid-century modern items you encounter in your appraisal assignments.

¹ Christopher Wilk. "Introduction: What was Modernism?" in *Modernism 1914-1939: Designing a New World* (South Kensington: V&A Publications, 2006), 14.

² Esbjørn Hiort, *Danish Modern Furniture* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1956), 5.

³ Carl Hansen & Son, "History: Carl Hansen & Son" [website online]; available from <http://www.carlhansen.com/craftsmanship/history/>; accessed 15 December 2015.

⁴ Emma Tucker, "Hans J Wegner fakes destroyed by Norwegian authorities," *Dezeen Magazine*, 8 October, 2015 [magazine online]; available from <http://www.dezeen.com/2015/10/08/hans-j-wegner-fake-round-chair-shipment-destroyed-norwegian-authorities/>; accessed 15 December 2015.

⁵ Earl Martin, ed. *Knoll Textiles, 1945-2010* (New Haven: Published for the Bard Graduate Center by Yale University Press, 2011).

⁶ Herman Miller, "Herman Miller Environmental Product Summary for Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman" [PDF online]; available from https://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/environmental/eps/EPS_ELO.pdf; accessed 15 December 2015.

⁷ Knoll Furniture, "Product Story, Barcelona Chair" [website online]; available from <http://www.knoll.com/product/barcelona-chair>; Internet; accessed 15 December 2015.

⁸ Vitra Design Museum, “B 3, Wassily – Marcel Breuer” [website online]; available from <http://www.design-museum.de/en/collection/100-masterpieces/detailseiten/b3wassily-marcel-breuer.html>; accessed 15 December 2015.