



Ruth
Adler Schnee

2015 Kresge Eminent Artist

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION



The Kresge Eminent Artist Award

honors an exceptional artist in the visual, performing or literary arts for lifelong professional achievements and contributions to metropolitan Detroit's cultural community.



Left: *Keys*, 1949. (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London); right: drawing, *Glyphs*, 1947. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Shown on cover background: *Fancy Free*, 1949. (Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy Cranbrook Art Museum); top left: *Woodleaves*, 1998; top right: *Narrow Gauge*, 1957; top center: *Bells*, 1995; bottom center: *Funhouse*, 2000; bottom: *Plaid*, 2001 reissue.

Ruth Adler Schnee is the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist. This monograph commemorates her life and work.





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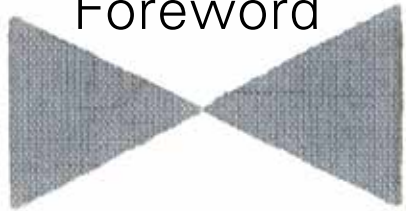
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Right: Drawing, *Raindrops*, 1947.
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The
Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Foreword



Ruth Adler at work on *Slits and Slats* in her first Detroit studio, 1947. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.) Background: *Semaphore*, 1951-53. (Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy Cranbrook Art Museum.)

“To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order or even to edit: it is to add value and meaning, to illuminate, to simplify, to clarify, to modify, to dignify, to dramatize, to persuade and perhaps even to amuse. To design is to transform prose into poetry.”

– Paul Rand, art director and graphic designer

The Kresge Foundation is proud to honor Ruth Adler Schnee as the Kresge Eminent Artist for 2015.

She has been a pioneer not only in defining the modern look of architectural interiors, but also in redefining postwar America’s sense of public space – often working with some of the world’s most prominent architects. Her work and her influence reach intimately into homes in Southeast Michigan and across the country, where she may not be a widely recognized name, but has brought the crisp look and feel of the modern design era.

In this monograph, you’ll discover an artist with an inspiring personal story, a rich body of work, an entrepreneurial spirit and a passion for her art that has continued unabated into her 90s.

As a Jewish immigrant who escaped Nazi Germany and launched an influential business in Detroit, as a woman who broke through barriers in a male-dominated field, as a Detroit native who helped shape an international sensibility, her story speaks to the value of inclusiveness, to the entrepreneurial spirit and to the profound role the arts play in nurturing our souls.

Rip Rapson
President and CEO
The Kresge Foundation

Artist's Statement



Good design is my life.

It must be discernable to the observant eye. But recognition comes slowly.

I have tried to learn from the genius of others to bring my own vision to my story. Being inspired by the world around me, I respect the medium in which I work. I will do the project over – and over – until I find validity in my own statement. This brings me the thrill of discovery.

Sixty-eight years ago, when I first thought of designing abstract-patterned drapery fabrics in brilliant colors, there was great opposition by purist architects and the public.

This pursuit did not provide a living to support our family. I returned to architectural design, my other love.

Within the heart of my clients' culture, I could create aesthetic unity, which addressed their human need for space.

Today, I feel pride that the reissue of my midcentury archival designs are recognized and have endured over time.

– Ruth Adler Schnee, 2015

Life

***“It’s not what you
look at that matters,
it’s what you see.”***

–Henry David Thoreau

Background: *Narrow Gauge*, 1953. Right: Ruth Adler, age 3, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1926.



Destiny Detroit

Ruth Adler Schnee



Coming from Germany in 1939, my family made their home in Detroit. We soon discovered that Detroit's strength is its people. Enormous encouragement by art teachers, a four-year scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design and a fellowship to Cranbrook prompted me to open my studio here.

Detroit is where I met the love of my life. Edward Schnee had recently graduated from Yale University; we created a partnership, Adler-Schnee, which became a Detroit institution for avant-garde designs in architectural spaces, furnishings and textiles. It attracted kindred spirits.

Philip Johnson pointed out to us that more architects worked here in contemporary design than in any other U.S. city. The list started with Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki and Alexander Girard – many of whom became our friends. Charles Eames and George Nelson, working at Herman Miller in Zeeland, Michigan, told us the public would accept whatever we were creating as long as it was well designed. They were correct, but it took 50 years for their prediction to come true!

Ask me why I stayed in Detroit and I will tell you about a most misunderstood city. I have enjoyed Detroit's extraordinary location on a major waterway, close proximity to Canada, a multifaceted musical life, the Detroit Institute of Arts and much more.

I have enjoyed the people, the people that called on us and my work. 🍷



Top: The Schnee family on an outing in 1959. Leading the way, Edward Schnee, followed by Daniel, Jeremy, Ruth and daughter Anita. Right: Ruth Adler Schnee in the first Adler-Schnee showroom on 12th Street, holding fabric silkscreened with her *Beans and Bones* design. On the wall behind her, the award-winning *Strata Keys* is draped across the chair. Pottery on the Eames table is by Nancy Wickham, Detroit, 1950. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, *The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.*)



Ruth Adler Schnee at home in Southfield, Michigan.

Transcendent Vision

Sue Levitsky

Designer Ruth Adler Schnee, the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist, helped define the look of mid-20th-century modernism, leaving an indelible mark on the interior landscape of American life.

“Life is full of stories. You just have to catch them!” says Ruth Adler Schnee in explaining her signature approach to the design process. Catching up with Adler Schnee is challenging, however, as she is constantly in motion, her itinerary for a week in March reflecting business as usual for the storied designer.

“I have the opening of a museum exhibition of my work to attend in New York City. The next morning, I’m meeting with KnollTextiles executives to present newly commissioned designs. On Wednesday, I’m to be filmed for a new documentary on Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson sponsored by the Stewart Program for Modern Design,” she says.

Adler Schnee presents her status report while fielding phone calls from interior planning clients, exchanging correspondence with curators from Germany’s Vitra Museum – “they want to speak with me about my work with Alexander Girard” – and planning her comments for the Cooper-Hewitt’s modernist symposium in May 2015. There are also speeches to write and lectures to deliver.

Ruth Adler Schnee’s life is clearly rich in the rewards of a substantial and increasingly celebrated career. So why, at the age of 92, does she continue to work as hard as she does?

“I do the work because I love it!” says Adler Schnee. “It’s part of my background, my upbringing. I’m thrilled I’m still able to do it when others are retiring. Design has always been part of my life and I don’t know what I would do if I were to give it up.”

Far from retiring, Ruth Adler Schnee is still enormously productive and winning recognition.

“We’re excited to honor a Detroit artist who has won national acclaim, whose personal and professional stories are compelling and inspirational,” said Rip Rapson, president and CEO of The Kresge Foundation, in announcing Adler Schnee as the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist.

Adler Schnee was named a Kresge Eminent Artist for her pioneering role in shaping American modernism. Her textile and environmental designs, along with Adler-Schnee, the design studio and store owned by Ruth and her husband,

Edward Schnee, brought modernism to metropolitan Detroit during its zenith of industry and prosperity and substantiated Michigan’s reputation as the epicenter of contemporary industrial and architectural design.

“Ruth is a trailblazer,” says her friend Maxine Frankel, chairwoman of the board of governors of the Cranbrook Academy of Art and Cranbrook Art Museum. “She found her own path. She never let the walls that came up stop her. She’s not only a role model for women, she’s a role model for all professionals.”



Ruth Adler Schnee and fellow textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen during filming for a documentary on Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson, New York, New York, March 2015. (Photograph courtesy Philippe Baylaucq.)

Born to the Bauhaus

Ruth Adler was born in the German city of Frankfurt, moving to the more modern metropolis of Düsseldorf with her family at the age of 4. The families of Joseph and Marie Adler had lived in Frankfurt for generations – their ancestors are first mentioned in the 1530 annals of the city.

Ruth’s mother, Marie Salomon Adler, studied art as a young woman, first with Hans Hofmann and later at the Bauhaus under Walter Gropius. Ruth grew up surrounded by artists – her family’s circle of friends included the sculptor Leopold Fleischhacker and the painter Paul Klee, whose vividly colored canvases would prove influential in the development of Ruth’s own aesthetic. The Adler home was filled with



Biedermeier and early Thonet furniture, impressionist paintings hanging in its many rooms.

Life began to change irrevocably when the Nazis hung their flags outside the Reichstag on Jan. 30, 1933. Ruth would attend public grade schools and a private high school until 1936, when publication of Hitler's Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their citizenship and disallowed educational pursuits.

In 1938, the Adler family home and possessions were destroyed in the Kristallnacht pogrom; Ruth's father was arrested, taken into "protective custody" and sent to the concentration camp at Dachau. Her mother worked heroically behind the scenes to secure her husband's release, visiting Nazi headquarters daily, pleading for word of his whereabouts until he was released and returned, starving, toothless, "almost unrecognizable" to his family. Marie Adler had also arranged for sponsorship and transport to America – all but impossible given immigration quotas – and the reunited family fled Germany for the United States aboard the Aquitania, landing in New York on March 4, 1939. Ruth was 16.

Ruth's diary entry, Feb. 23, 1939.

*"Ein Alpdruck ist von uns gefallen.
Deutschland liegt hinter uns.
Kann es denn wirklich wahr sein?
Wird man wieder als Mensch behandelt?
O, das ist zu schön um Wirklichkeit zu werden."*

*A millstone has fallen from us.
Germany lies behind us.
Can it really be true?
Is one recognized again as a human being?
Oh, it is too beautiful to become reality.*

Building a life in America

The Adlers eventually made their home in Detroit – Ruth's father had been promised employment in the city. Ruth attended Cass Technical High School, where her artistic talent was nurtured through classes in drawing, costume illustration and pattern making. Ruth also helped with the family's finances by working nights at the Awrey Bakery and after school for Winkelmanns' display department. (Winkelmanns was one of Detroit's most popular women's fashion stores. Ruth would later design fixtures and interiors for 17 Winkelmanns stores as the chain expanded in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.)

Upon graduation from Cass, Ruth received a full scholarship to study at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. She began her studies as a costume illustration major but switched course, graduating instead with a degree in interior architecture.

Despite the cachet of an architectural degree from the prestigious RISD, Adler's diploma didn't guarantee a position with an architectural firm. The majority of architectural design firms did not hire Jewish applicants or women during the postwar years. Adler began submitting her drawings to competitions, hoping to draw attention to the excellence of

her work. She won Condé Nast's celebrated Prix de Paris competition, an honor she shares with Joan Didion and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. The prize came with job placement, first at Lord & Taylor, which Adler rejected after three days – "antique furniture is not really my interest," she admitted to the publisher. Condé Nast understood and secured her a position at the firm of renowned industrial designer Raymond Loewy, where Ruth met architects Warren Platner and Minoru Yamasaki, who became lifelong friends. (Yamasaki would enlist both Adler Schneé and Platner in his design for the World Trade Center – Adler Schneé for interiors and finishing materials, Platner for the Windows on the World restaurant.)

A Cranbrook education

At the insistence of her parents, Adler applied for graduate work at the Cranbrook Academy of Art and won a fellowship,

completing her MFA studies in 1946. Cranbrook brought Ruth into the orbit of Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, Cranbrook's first president, and his wife, Loja Saarinen, who headed the academy's weaving department. Ruth would often join the Saarinens at their home, where she learned from their example to "have the discipline and the energy and stamina to do things over and over again until there is validity to my own statement and respect for the medium in which I work," according to her oral interview for the American Archives at the Smithsonian. Ruth was also impressed with the obsessive work ethic of ceramicist Maija Grotell: "Many nights at Cranbrook we would hear Maija smashing her previous day's work. She wouldn't settle for anything less than her absolute best," says Adler Schneé.

Ruth's practice of submitting her work to competitions received encouragement from Eliel Saarinen. She would earn her first design commission from a prize won in 1947



Left and below: Ruth devoted many hours as a child to designing a home and comfortable interiors for the "Swinegel Familie." Adler Schneé's signature use of vivid color and pattern is already established in these early drawings. Germany, 1931.

Opposite top left: Ruth, age 3, Düsseldorf, 1926; bottom left: Ruth in a formal picture taken at Rhode Island School of Design. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schneé Papers); left, large: family portrait of the Adler/Salomon family taken on the 75th birthday of Ernst Salomon, Ruth's maternal grandfather, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1927. Ruth sits at left on the floor, wearing a green silk shantung dress with white smocking she designed at age 4. "My mother had it made up for me. I loved it so much," recalls Adler Schneé.





Drawings for blouses and blazer, 1942. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Clay model of water pitcher designed by Ruth Adler as a Cranbrook student, 1946. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Cranbrook Academy of Art design class, Ruth Adler seated on left, 1946. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Ruth Adler and Edward Schnee cut the cake on their wedding day in Detroit, May 23, 1948.

through the “Better Rooms for Better Living” competition sponsored by the Chicago Tribune. The firm of Shaw, Ness & Murphy saw her original textile designs in her winning modernist kitchen plan and asked her to realize her abstract-patterned shapes and bold colors as draperies for its new auto showrooms. It was the beginning of silkscreen prints on fabric backgrounds of many textures.

Adler meets Schnee: A family business is born

Ruth Adler opened her first studio, Ruth Adler Inc., in 1947 on Detroit’s 12th Street with seed money from Shaw, Ness & Murphy and additional funding from Detroit philanthropist Fred Butzel. She used tailor’s canvas, a combination of mohair and cotton, to silkscreen her designs for the auto showroom draperies, choosing the material out of necessity – very little textile yardage was available at the end of World War II and the highly durable fabric was both easily obtainable in wide widths and inexpensive.

It was also the year Ruth Adler met soul mate Edward Schnee, the Yale economics major who became her husband and partner in 1948. Together they managed the fledgling design studio, with Ed Schnee silkscreening. It gave him much pleasure to name Ruth’s designs as they came off her drawing board, often inspired by their children’s contributions to shape and line. “*Fission Chips, Slits and Slats, Strings and Things* – Eddie thought of all those wonderful, alliterative names,” she recalls of the wordplay Schnee used to identify her textiles.

Adler Schnee’s work was soon being critically received, winning the American Institute of Decorators Award in 1947 and 1948 and the important International Celanese Corporation Prize for *Strata* in 1950. (The inspiration for *Strata* came from Adler Schnee’s design *Germination*, itself created during the Schnees’ 1948 honeymoon in Arizona and Colorado.) Edgar Kaufmann Jr., the curator at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, would bestow its 1954 Good Design Award to Adler Schnee’s *Seedy Weeds*, a silkscreen print on a plain cotton weave produced by Adler-Schnee Associates Inc. from 1953 through 1965.

Invitations to collaborate with the leaders of modern architecture soon followed. Adler Schnee created textile designs and interior architectural plans for Buckminster Fuller’s redesigned Ford Rotunda, Eero Saarinen’s General Motors Technical Center (Eero was Eliel’s son), Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Affleck House in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and interior finishes and colors for what would become one of the most recognized structures in modern history, the twin

towers of Minoru Yamasaki’s World Trade Center in New York.

In 1955, after a combustion fire caused by silkscreening chemicals destroyed their Puritan Street storefront, the Schnees moved their growing business to an elegant space on Livernois, Detroit’s “Avenue of Fashion.” Ed Schnee would describe this latest incarnation of store and studio as “more than merely a place to outfit home and kitchen. It has become the only source for the finest artifacts for all aspects of contemporary home life, from all over the world. Many items pioneered by Adler-Schnee are now included in the Museum of Modern Art permanent collection as examples of the highest standards in functional aesthetic excellence.”

The Schnees’ home life was expanding as well: Anita, Jeremy and Daniel Schnee were born in the 1950s, attended Detroit schools and graduated from Michigan universities. Each turned to law as a career.

Creative placemaking in Harmonie Park

By 1964, the Schnees had outgrown the suburban sensibilities of their Livernois location and wanted to join in the diversified mix of downtown Detroit, moving to Harmonie Park’s Hemmeter Building. The store prospered until the 1967 riots occurred and downtown Detroit was no longer a shopping destination. “It had been a Detroit tradition to come downtown, meet under the Kern’s clock and have lunch at Hudson’s. Many stopped in to buy at Adler-Schnee, just a block away. That ended and it became very difficult to get people to come downtown,” says Adler Schnee.

Ed Schnee would develop legendary advertising campaigns and promotional events in response to lagging sales, attracting new customers and recognition for the Schnees’ many contributions to Detroit’s cultural scene.

“We instigated the Harmonie Park Art Fair and brought members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra to play in Harmonie Park,” says Adler Schnee. “I also worked with the merchants of Greektown to create a cohesive color scheme that would unite and identify the storefronts. This effort evolved and came to be celebrated in the Greektown Festival – Eddie and I received the key to the city of Detroit for this community event.”

The Schnees had intuitively and singlehandedly undertaken what is now known as “creative placemaking,” animating the area around Adler-Schnee and the store itself with cultural and social activities, hoping to shape the physical and social character of their Detroit neighborhood. The Schnees’ activism was recognized by the City Council for “singlehandedly stabilizing a corner of downtown Detroit,”



Ruth’s children Anita, Jeremy and Daniel (seated front). “This photo was taken by one of my friends who also escaped from Nazi Germany, Suzie Falk,” says Adler Schnee.



Adler-Schnee Livernois storefront under construction, Detroit, 1954. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

but it wasn't enough. Harmonie Park had become a destination too far for Adler-Schnee's customers, and the Schnees closed their beloved store in 1976.

Recognition, at last, for textiles

All the while the Schnees were operating their retail shop and studio, Ruth carried on with her interior design work, garnering numerous commercial, residential and civic commissions. She also continued to sell her brightly colored textile designs, although their reception by the public was limited. "Purist architects were only comfortable with the color white," she says.

Support came much later through curators, beginning with the Art Institute of Chicago's Christa Thurman, who opened the institute's textile gallery with Ruth's work. "She came to view my textiles at the suggestion of the curator David A. Hanks. She left with boxes and boxes of my early designs," says Adler Schnee.

Hanks himself had come across Adler Schnee's work in 1987, when he discovered *Bugs in Booby Traps*. Enchanted with the playful design, Hanks acquired it and additional Adler Schnee designs for the Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts. Hanks would later curate a seminal group exhibition on modernism in Montreal, 1991's "What Modernism Was." He included several of Adler Schnee's designs in the show, stirring new interest in her work.

The reintroduction of Adler Schnee's designs began in 1992, when the Archive Collection of ICF/Unika Vaev reproduced several of her designs from 1947 through 1950 and marketed them worldwide.

Adler Schnee began her relationship with Anzea Textiles in 1994. "With the trending resurgence of the midcentury modern movement, we felt it absolutely necessary to introduce new patterns by the woman who lived, worked and designed alongside the very people who shaped the midcentury modern design era," says Mitzi Mills, principal of Anzea Textiles.

Reissues and new designs for the health care industry are at the heart of Adler Schnee's latest collaboration with KnollTextiles. She entered into a relationship with the contemporary design firm in 2012.

"It's been a wonderful career," says Adler Schnee. "I'm glad the work I designed 70 years ago is now being recognized and that Ed and I were able to spread the gospel of modern design."

"Ruth is one of many females with great training but who, at the time when they were practicing, weren't properly credited for the work they did. Modernism didn't value



Designs in progress at Adler Schnee's studio, 2015.

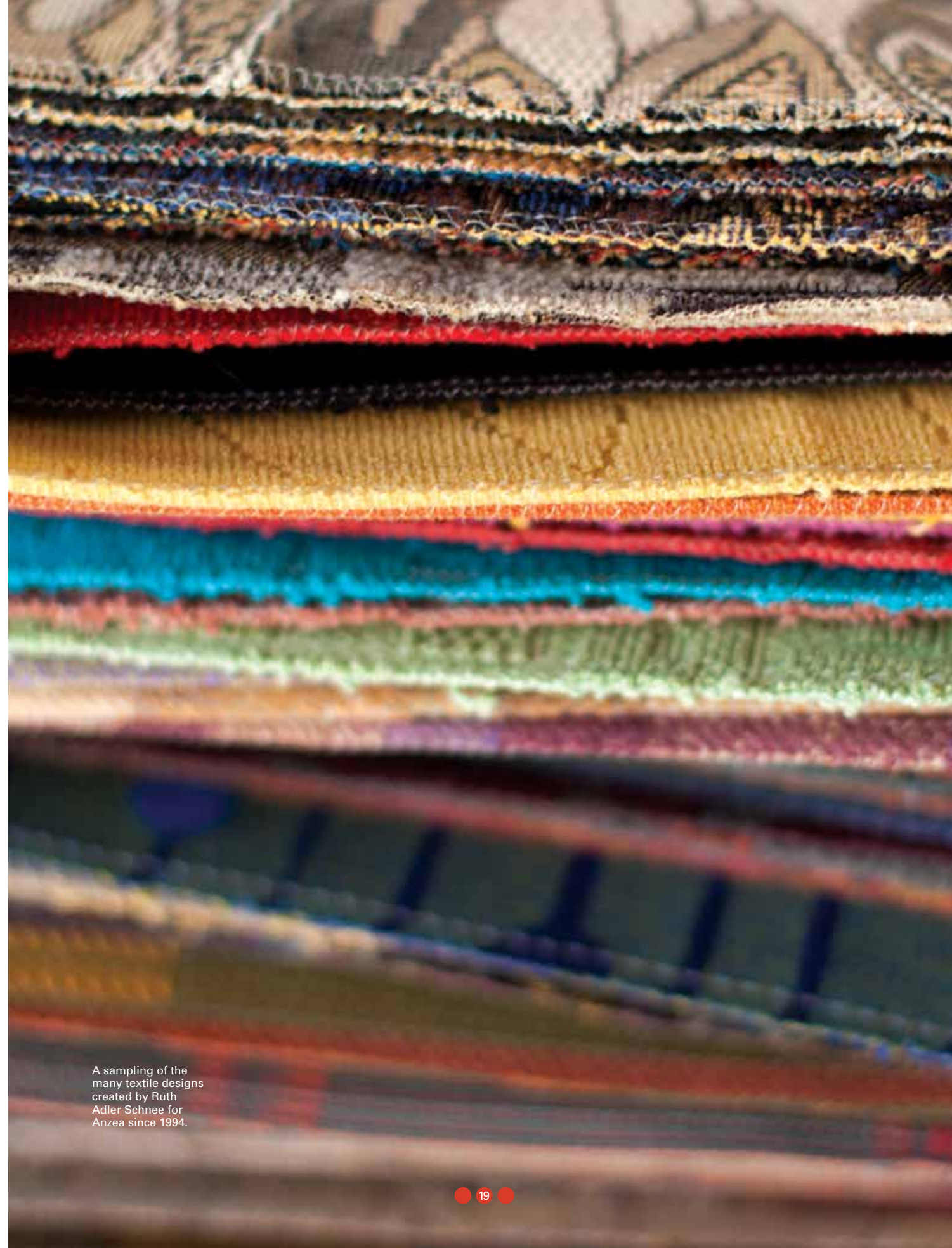
pattern, color or the 'decorative' in the early part of her career, but her work is growing in influence," says Ronit Eisenbach, an associate professor of architecture at the University of Maryland and the co-producer, with director Terri Sarris of the University of Michigan, of the 2010 film "The Radiant Sun: Designer Ruth Adler Schnee."

Ruth Adler Schnee has overcome a multitude of complications and obstacles – escape from Nazi Germany, a dearth of jobs for female and Jewish architects, a passion for contemporary design that didn't always translate into thriving business, the loss of her beloved husband and partner in 2000 – to become one of the founding figures of contemporary textile and interior design, a product of the American dream and her own quest for truth, purity and beauty.

"I don't think the right question to ask is 'What is Ruth's influence?' but more, why has she not had a greater impact until now," says Eisenbach. "The work she did is really important."

Says Adler Schnee: "I am not a believer that women can't break the 'glass ceiling.' I really strongly believe if women do a good job and they are talented and they are dependable, they will get ahead. Chauvinism has never stopped me. The wheel of modernism has come full circle and I couldn't be happier." 🍷

Sue Levytsky writes about the arts and popular culture. Her essay was written expressly for this publication, of which she is also the editor.



A sampling of the many textile designs created by Ruth Adler Schnee for Anzea since 1994.



Backgammon,
1951. (Photograph
by R.H. Hensleigh
and Tim Thayer,
courtesy of
Cranbrook Art
Museum.)

Ruth Adler Schnee | 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist

Return to Influence

Gregory Wittkopp



The dining room of Saarinen House, designed by Eliel Saarinen in the late 1920s, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Ruth Adler Schnee is legendary, but not everyone knows the true significance of her story. Her career has paralleled the trajectory of modernism, from its creation to its fading out of favor to its rediscovery in the wake of postmodernism.

While Ruth's work, in particular her textiles, transformed the interiors of homes and offices across the United States, her designs of the late 1940s and 1950s receded from the limelight for a period when modernism left little room for anything but the most formal of design solutions. Ruth's work, which we now love for its figurative – and at times whimsical – references to life and nature, was not considered pure or abstracted enough during that period of high modernism. I have been thinking about this in the context of one of Ruth's instructors and mentors, Eliel Saarinen, and the house he designed for his family at Cranbrook. Completed in 1930, Saarinen House was celebrated in its first 20 years as a remarkable new modern home but then receded in influence.

In the wake of postmodernism, we look back on architectural modernism, especially in its second generation, and realize there often was little humanity in this architecture. Postmodernism arrived on the scene and, in a very exaggerated manner, forced everyone to step back and look for the alternatives that paralleled this stark modernism and offered something more accessible. That's when people looked back to what Eliel Saarinen was doing.

Now they're looking back to what Ruth was doing.

Ruth's designs have always struck the perfect balance between her sources and the degree to which she abstracts them. This connectivity in her work is one of the reasons people today are looking back to her textiles and finding

them a refreshing alternative to the starker designs of modernism. And, of course, there is color. Ruth is an amazing and bold colorist who has never been afraid to use color and never felt that only one color might be used in a space.

Ruth made a statement with her textiles, believing her designs could have a role within the spaces being designed by Saarinen, Yamasaki and other leading lights of modernist architecture. These architects, in turn, realized Ruth's textiles could make their spaces more enjoyable to inhabit and ultimately much more memorable. The design world is finally acknowledging that there had to be women, pioneers like Ruth, whose work informed contemporary design culture.

Ruth's is a story of national and international significance, but one with particular resonance in Michigan. It is only fitting that she is at last being properly credited within the design historical worlds and recognized as a Kresge Eminent Artist. 🍷

Gregory Wittkopp is the director of the Cranbrook Art Museum and the Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research.

Generative Design

Ronit Eisenbach

Since Ruth Adler Schnee was named the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist, numerous people have asked me to speak about the influence and impact of her work.

From my perspective, the right question is not, “How has Ruth Adler Schnee’s work influenced the design field?” but rather, “Why is her oeuvre only being celebrated now?”

While the Art Institute of Chicago opened its textile galleries with many of Ruth’s designs and curator David A. Hanks included Adler Schnee in his influential 1991 “What Is Modernism” show in Montreal, the reality is Adler Schnee’s work was not as well known beyond Detroit as it should have been.

Though her designs were beautiful, whimsical and elegant, they were not included in courses on midcentury modern architecture, interiors or textiles in the 1980s, 1990s and first decade of the 21st century. No catalog, monograph or serious solo exhibition of her work existed until the University of Maryland Kibel Gallery 2009 exhibition “Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color and Design.” I was the exhibition’s curator.

Adler Schnee was not alone in this relative exile – until recently, it was the exception rather than the rule for the work of women designers to be included in university courses or history books.

It was extremely difficult for women to make a place for themselves in the design world of postwar America – no one hired female architects, and practitioners of modern architecture didn’t want their purist designs marred by “decorative” colors and patterns. The theoretical roots for this latter situation may be traced to early-20th-century European modernism and the rise of functional, rational and reductivist modernism typified by Le Corbusier’s domestic ideal of the “house as a machine for living in” and architect Adolf Loos’ 1908 manifesto, “Ornament and Crime,” which equated ornament with degeneration.

In her essay “European Émigrés in the U.S.: Midcentury Textile Design Culture,” for the catalog of the exhibition “Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color,” textile historian Elsa Danese notes that “especially from the mid-1940s, the modern field of textiles emerged as a field of growing significance.” The rise of the auto industry, the introduction of new industrial materials and printing technologies along

with crafts learned by women designers in schools such as the Wiener Werkstätte combined to set the stage for textile design to be recognized as “formally coherent with the design of modern architecture.”

In the United States, Danese writes, “the conjunction of industrial development in the automobile sector, alongside the construction of modern public and private buildings, fostered the demand for modern materials in interior design.”

In fact, the conjunction of automobile culture and interiors plays into Adler Schnee’s story as well. Ruth recalls that her start in the textile world began when an architect who juried the “Better Rooms for Better Living” competition saw her entry, admired the draperies she had designed and set her up to create printed fabrics for the large windows of the automobile showrooms he was designing.

“How can we expand the canon for future generations of designers?”

Two generations after Ruth received her degree from Cranbrook, graduating at a time when jobs for talented, credentialed Jews and women were rare, a shift has finally taken place. Women architects are now licensed, hold academic positions in architecture and other design fields and practice publicly in firms. Our voices, while not yet as strong as we hope they will become, have begun to be heard. Our individual and collective design work and scholarship has begun to be celebrated and acknowledged. And not surprisingly, this generation has begun to ask: “Where are the female voices that preceded us? Why was their work absent from the history classes we took? How can we change the narrative for the next generation?”

The chance came in 2001 when I met Ruth Adler Schnee. Two generations apart, we quickly learned we had much in common – Rhode Island School of Design and Cranbrook educations, a Jewish heritage and a shared love for what Ruth so aptly calls “a spirit of experimental design.” Our meeting and ultimately our friendship led to a decade-plus effort to document and increase awareness of Adler Schnee’s designs and expand scholarship on the contributions of women designers to mid-20th-century modernism. To do so I have collaborated with Ruth and filmmaker Terri Sarris,

graphic designer Hannah Smotrich, architect Caterina Frisone and the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation for initial support.

Inspired by Ruth’s articulation that “everything around us is a design, whether it is a leaf, a flower or a stone,” we created the exhibition, first shown at the University of Maryland and followed by Venice two years later (the first solo exhibition of her work in Europe), catalog and film to elucidate and celebrate the intertwining of Ruth’s life and work with future designers in mind. In the exhibition, we focused on Adler Schnee’s textiles and design process by including sketches and quotes that helped the viewer trace each journey from its source of inspiration to final design. Fabric samples produced in a variety of colorways were available for visitors to handle and compare. Something essential was transmitted – the value of meticulous, rigorous design exploration paired with what Ruth calls “a desire to give new direction to established concepts.”

Ruth’s life and work speak for themselves in Terri Sarris’s film, “The Radiant Sun.” Since 2009, the film has been screened at prestigious venues nationwide including the National Building Museum in Washington, Ringling Museum of Art in Florida, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Cranbrook Art Museum and the University of Maryland Kibel Gallery. As a result, the film has brought Ruth’s work to national attention. Perhaps most significantly, support from the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation and the Graham Foundation allowed us in 2014 to distribute “The Radiant Sun” to every architecture and interior design program in North America.

As a result of our collective efforts, Ruth Adler Schnee’s work has become more widely known and increasingly celebrated. Her selection as a Kresge Eminent Artist and the accompanying monograph contribute to shifting the narrative of design history so her influence may continue to expand and inspire future generations of designers. 🍷

Ronit Eisenbach, RA, is associate professor of architecture and Kibel Gallery chair at the University of Maryland. She is also the co-editor of the catalog “Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color” and co-producer of “The Radiant Sun: Designer Ruth Adler Schnee.”



“Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color” was curated by Ronit Eisenbach and Caterina Frisone. The exhibition was presented June 4-Aug. 28, 2011 at Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice, Italy. (Photograph: Alessandra Bello.)

Design

**“One eye sees,
the other feels.” – Paul Klee**

Humpty Dumpty, 1949.

Inspiration: Modernism

Ruth Adler Schnee

Designer Ruth Adler Schnee often lectures on the history and significance of midcentury modern design. Here, Adler Schnee, whose friends, collaborators and contemporaries included Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki, George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames, speaks to the enduring influence of modernism in her work and creative process.

The guiding principles of today's designs were forged, clarified and purified after World War II, in the 1940s and 1950s. It was a time of changing ideas, the birth of what has come to be known as midcentury modern design.

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought an end to the luxury market. Architects and industrial designers moved to a more rational style. Architecture began to reflect a need for volume rather than mass, and these expansive spaces required large-scale designs of textile patterns in bold colors. That modernist canon is the Bauhaus pedagogy.

The Bauhaus was born in 1919, when the Weimar Kunstgewerbe Schule (School of Applied Arts) and Hochschule (High School) were merged. The architect **Walter Gropius** became the director of the school and renamed it Bauhaus (Building House). He outlined the mission for the new school, saying: “The Bauhaus strives to combine all the arts – sculpture, painting, applied art and visual art – as the inseparable components of a new architecture.”

The Bauhaus was more than a building. It was experimentation. It was creative play, a hope that the arts would find their way into industry and utilize new materials and production methods. Bicycle handles, for example, inspired the bent steel tube legs of **Marcel Breuer's** design for dining room table and chairs.

The philosophy of the Bauhaus represented a total rejection of past teaching methods. These modern thinkers were my



Walter Gropius (1883-1969)



Marcel Breuer
Cesca chair, 1928
Stainless steel, leather



Paul Klee
One Who Understands, 1934
Oil and gypsum on canvas



Johannes Itten
Dictum, 1921
Lithograph

parents' circle of friends. The group exchanged opinions on political developments. There was a sense of growth of their artistic works, no doubt influenced by world affairs as they related to the arts.

I grew up during the “age of the giant state” – Hitler's Germany. I was immersed in the modernist doctrine through my parents, their activities and their friends. **Streamlined modernism, biomorphic modernism, modern patterns and ornaments** and **expressionism** fascinated me.

I was also very influenced by our family friend, the painter **Paul Klee**. Upon the urging of my parents, Klee accepted a position at the Düsseldorf Academy. He moved into our neighborhood and into my life. Playing in the Klee studio with mobiles, constructions and colors remains unforgettable to me.

Hitler closed the Bauhaus in 1933. In 1934, Gropius sought political asylum in England, bringing with him Breuer, **Johannes Itten**, Wassily Kandinsky and László Moholy-Nagy.

By 1937, Gropius had become the head of the school of architecture at Harvard University. I was able to reconnect with him, one of my parents' old friends, when I joined his classes in Cambridge. I was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design at the time and Cambridge was a short trip away.

In the summer of 1945, I worked as assistant to the chief architectural designer in the office of **Raymond Loewy**. The

French-born Loewy brought industrial design to the United States. Minoru Yamasaki, the architect of the World Trade Center, and Warren Platner, the designer of many of Knoll Furniture's most recognized chairs, ottomans and tables, also worked in Loewy's office at this time. We worked together designing and redesigning some of the most iconic logos in America, including Coca-Cola, Lucky Strike cigarettes and Shell Oil.

I accepted a fellowship to study with **Eliel Saarinen** at the **Cranbrook Academy of Art** in 1946. Cranbrook was an enchanted place at that time, graduating people who brought furniture, lamps and fabrics from the mundane into magic. **Charles Eames** taught there and produced experimental designs with furniture, photography, multimedia exhibitions and all things visual.

Despite the example of these very successful modernist designs, the idea of using organic forms in design, coupled with new materials in untried and revolutionary methods, was difficult for me to grasp.

At the end of World War II, with America's building industry booming, the Chicago Tribune sponsored a competition for architects and designers to design a contemporary house and kitchen, showing the gadgets that had been developed during the war and were now on the market. I won the competition and it set me on a new career track. I couldn't find appropriate textiles for the large glass areas I had designed. Abstract drapery patterns of my own design were the answer.

The architects at Shaw, Ness & Murphy saw my work and wanted my designs for the automobile showroom they were designing. They needed shading materials to avoid the fading of the automotive lacquers of the new models. They paid me a financial advance to print my textile designs.

In 1947, when I first thought of the idea of silk-screen-printed abstract drapery designs on textiles, the United States was the largest market for contemporary art in the world.

My primary concern was to design the transposition of the world around us and discover new materials in which to work. I firmly believe that the functional aspect of a design must always be present. It should prevail in provoking the intellect.

Streamlining

I rediscovered "streamlining" in the 1940s. The style combines the principles of modernism with aerodynamic engineering to offer the least resistance to wind. Streamlining is most often expressed in the design of cars, trains, planes and buildings. Architects of the day were very influenced by this new style: boxy shapes of architecture became bullet-like. Ornamentation was now used to indicate speed, as was horizontality.

Industrial designers were equally fascinated by this futuristic style and its influence was soon expressed in their designs for homes, offices and automobiles. Herman Miller, based in Zeeland, Michigan, began manufacturing furniture



for the bedroom based on the designs of Gilbert Rohde, its head designer. Raymond Loewy brought his famous interpretation of streamlining to automobile manufacturer Studebaker, for which he designed the Avanti in 1961. In the applied arts, **Walter Dorwin Teague** designed radios, clocks, toasters and, notably, cameras for the Eastman Kodak Company, including the Bantam Special, first manufactured in 1936. And **Donald Deskey** designed the now iconic interior of Radio City Music Hall, with its sleek tables, chairs and light fixtures.

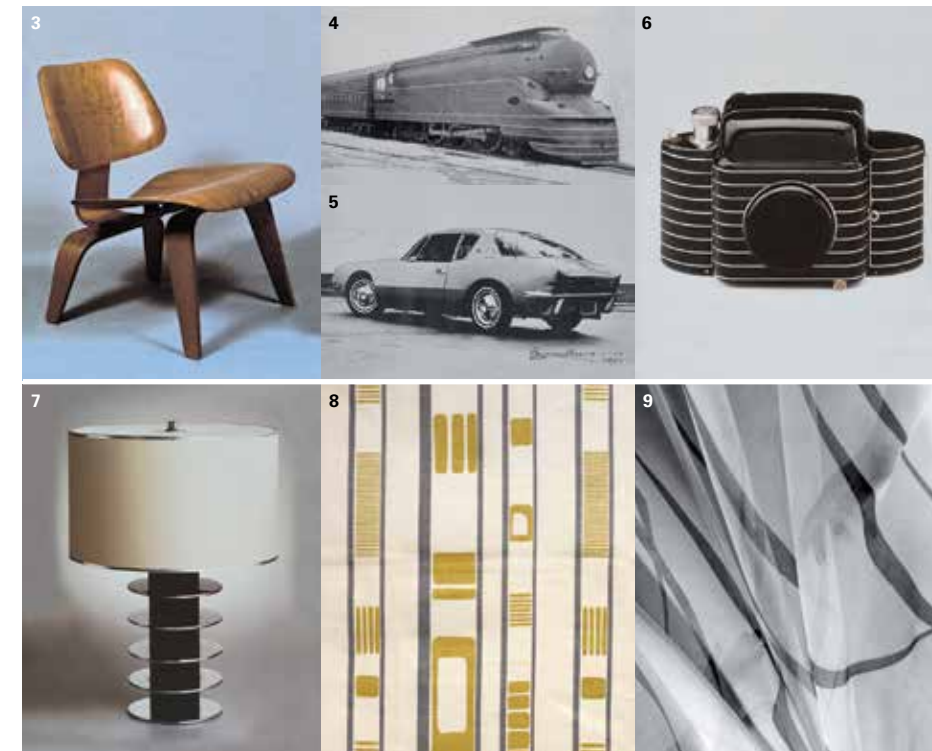
In 1947 I designed *Slits and Slats*.

In 1950 I designed *Strata*, which won the International Celanese Corporation Prize.

Strata was reinterpreted and reissued by the Rhode

Island School of Design in two colors for gift wrap in 2009. In 2013 it was reissued by KnollTextiles for hospital privacy curtains, in six colorways.

Streamlining was criticized and dismissed by the Museum of Modern Art. But I think it had a glamour that made it popular. It created a style; it created a new silhouette; it imposed an order, which did not result from the object's function. It was ornamental. It must be judged by itself. Seventy years later, it still conveys an aura of sophistication.



- 1 Raymond Loewy
Coca-Cola dispenser design,
1947
- 2 Eliel Saarinen
Cranbrook Academy, 1943
Detail, fountain sculpture
- 3 Charles Eames
Lounge chair, 1950
Bent plywood
- 4 Raymond Loewy
Locomotive design, 1936
Pennsylvania Railroad
- 5 Raymond Loewy
Avanti design, 1961
Studebaker Company
- 6 Walter Dorwin Teague
Bantam Special camera, 1936
Eastman Kodak Company
- 7 Donald Deskey
Table lamp, 1934
Wood, chrome-plated metal
- 8 *Slits and Slats*, 1947
- 9 *Strata*, 1950

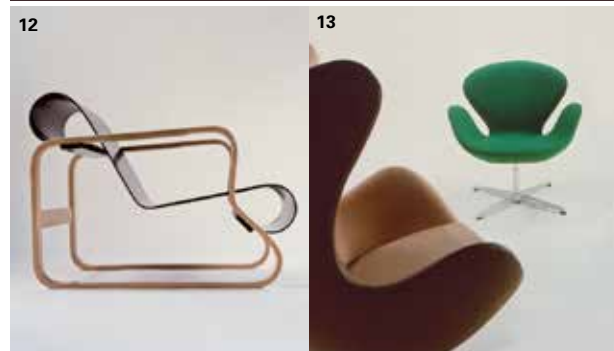
Biomorphic Modern

I then grew to admire **biomorphic modern**, which takes its inspiration from organic shapes. The movement had its origin in 1915-1917 with the sculptor Jean Arp.

Designers were now influenced by sculptors and painters – not architects. The work of **Henry Moore** and **Alexander Calder** exemplifies the influence that would be seen in furniture design, architecture, accessories and my own textile designs. Echoes of Moore’s organic shapes are evident in the fluid furniture designs of Finnish architect and designer **Alvar Aalto** and **Arne Jacobson**, the Danish architect and designer whose Swan chair remains an iconic example of minimal, functional design. Biomorphic design contributed to the postwar emphasis on curvilinear form. It was an original attempt to create a modern style.

In the middle to late 1950s, there was a new sense of creativity in furniture, fashion and decorative arts. The Museum of Modern Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, Art Institute of Chicago, Walker Art Center and House & Garden magazine were all institutionalized and felt a responsibility to showcase young designers who were synonymous with the forward look. From 1947 to 1955, I was asked to participate in 18 major exhibitions here and abroad. With this exposure, good contemporary design became a desirable commodity.

- 10** Alexander Calder
Flamingo, 1964
Mies van der Rohe
Federal Center
Chicago
Chicago
Painted stainless steel
- 11** Henry Moore
Two-piece reclining figure:
Holes, 1957
White marble
- 12** Alvar Aalto
Paimio chair, 1931-32
Bent plywood, solid birch
- 13** Arne Jacobson
Swan chair, 1958
Fabric, polished aluminum
- 14** *Germination*, 1948



Ornamentation

But it was not a rose garden. Many minimalist architects preferred the emphasis on scale and proportion of a structure’s architectural elements rather than surface ornamentation. This attitude had its origin in **Adolf Loos’** book, “Ins Leere Gesprochen” (“Spoken into the Void”). Mies van der Rohe was known for “less is more.” Le Corbusier said, “Pattern is obtrusive.” The only acceptable ornament for these architects was the grain of the wood, the texture of raw silk and the seams of leather.

In 1953, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., then curator of MOMA, declared “all surface patterns imitate the past.” MOMA was most unsympathetic to the **new language of ornament** created within modern art. The type of colorful, decorative style employed by French fauvist **Raoul Dufy** and impressionist master **Henri Matisse** in their art for textiles and rugs was held suspect in the art world. These masterpieces were judged to be the lesser works by these great artists. MOMA

didn’t realize that many designers’ tastes were formed by the exposure to these famous works of art. It gave rise to an ornamental language of great appeal and vitality. My own designs for *Nosegay* and *Country Fair* speak to the influence of this often whimsical style.

In 1965, Kaufmann, whose parents had commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater house, promoted an artistic and commercial collaboration: he initiated “Good Design” labels, to be attached to merchandise that had been successfully shown during the Chicago Merchandise Furniture Market and were worthy to be presented to the public. My designs were among those selected for this distinction.

In 1995 and 1996, the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design revitalized this effort and my work was again selected as Good Design. It stimulated an interest and opened the floodgates for manufacturers to pursue fresh and innovative ideas. It created demand for reissues of my earlier designs.



- 15** Adolf Loos
Steiner house, 1910
Vienna, Austria
- 16** Raoul Dufy
Regattas textile, 1925
Bianchini-Ferier silk twill
- 17** *Nosegay*, 1950
- 18** *Country Fair*, 1950
- 19** Henri Matisse
Mimosa rug maquette, 1949-51
Painted/cut/pasted paper

Abstract Expressionism

After World War II, New York became the undisputed art capital of the world. The **abstract expressionists** were at work. There was a new philosophy: The means of creation are as important as the end product. The process of creation is paint to be brushed, flung, dipped and splattered on the canvas. The canvases of painter **Franz Kline** and the ceramic sculptures of **Peter Voulkos** vividly represent the strong, emotional content seen in the work of this school.

Furniture and the decorative arts were affected as well. Where control of form and industrial perfection had been the norm, the emphasis switched to process, irregularity and chance as the ultimate function of the object. There was a conflict between spontaneity and structure. I designed **Batik** and **Pebbles** during this tumultuous period.

Designers are now aligned with painters and sculptors in a reaction against the traditional sense of modernism. Yet despite the belief that the present is unique and distinct from the past, with its numerous advances in technology, references to past historical styles appear. Certain simple forms are celebrated for their eternal beauty and function.

Modern design must make use of the good ideas of the past. I believe there should be a blend of modernist and classical solutions; they still have appeal. In the past when we silkscreened our designs, the selection of background material was difficult – in the aftermath of World War II, fabrics were rationed. Looking for an answer, I realized tailor canvas, widely available as interfacing for tailors, would be the solution. It has beautiful texture and a long life – important factors for commercial installations.

For the airline industry, which at that time partitioned first class from tourist class with curtains, we used clear plexiglass panels sandwiching sheer cotton batiste, which created a translucent division. We used transparent ink dyes for minimum fading and crocking. We wanted the background fabric texture to show through the color.

Where do design ideas come from? From all around us. As Goethe wrote, “The hardest thing to see is what’s under your very eyes.”

My sewing table gives me inspiration. The environment gives me inspiration, from stones to logs to leaves to snowflakes to flocks of birds.

Microscopic enlargements give me inspiration. Drifting snowflakes, for example.

Cityscapes are an inspiration, as are railroads and flags.

The process of design is arduous. The large blank sheet of paper in front of me is totally daunting. I devour reams of onionskin. I am not a painter. I am trained as an architectural designer. My tools are pencils, the T-square and the triangle.

The creation of the design may take as long as two years. It’s ready when it “sings” to me. But once a design is crystallized on paper, I perfect the repeat, which must comply with the width of the fabric both horizontally and vertically.

The same steps apply to all creative work. I dissect the problem into its smallest components. I scrutinize each individual component vis-à-vis the final, best solution and I incorporate this into the total context. The final solution must – and will – work as an aesthetic and functional unit.

My goal has always been to create aesthetic unity of pattern, color and texture and to address human needs of pleasure and economy. It is a search for perfection in all things, which will never go out of style.

John Ruskin wrote, “Quality is never an accident. It is a result of an intelligent effort to produce a superior product.” 🍷

This essay was adapted from a lecture given by Ruth Adler Schnee at the Grosse Pointe Public Library, Grosse Pointe, Michigan, in August 2014.



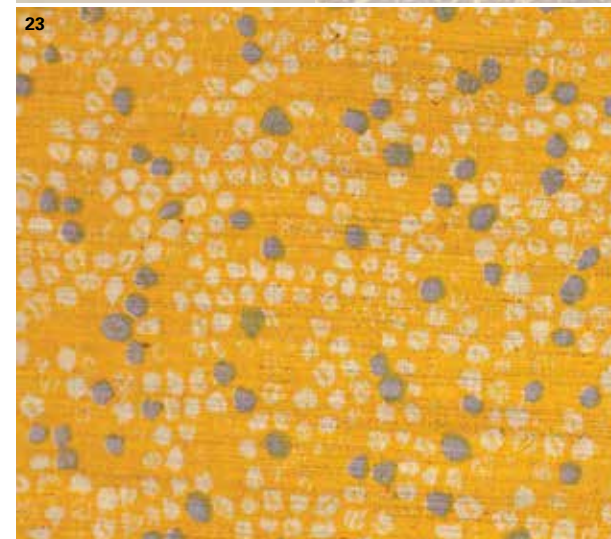
20 Franz Kline
Chief, 1950
Oil on canvas



21 Peter Voulkos
Sculpted pot, 1962
Heavy iron body, white slip stripe, turquoise glaze

22 *Batik*, 1947

23 *Pebbles*, 1949



Ruth Adler Schnee in her studio, March 2015.



Ruth Adler Schnee | 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist

Designs That Sing

R.F. Levine

With their clean, delineated abstract shapes set against mostly white backgrounds, Ruth Adler Schnee's midcentury archival textiles are among the purest examples of modernist design. The award-winning designs represented a fresh direction in textiles upon their introduction to the market in 1948 and a welcome respite in interior planning after the challenges of the war years.

"The postwar period – 1940s to the 1960s – was a period of printed fabrics," says Lynn Felsher, former textile curator at the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan. "After the drab war years, people wanted to buy bright, colorful fabric with bold patterns."

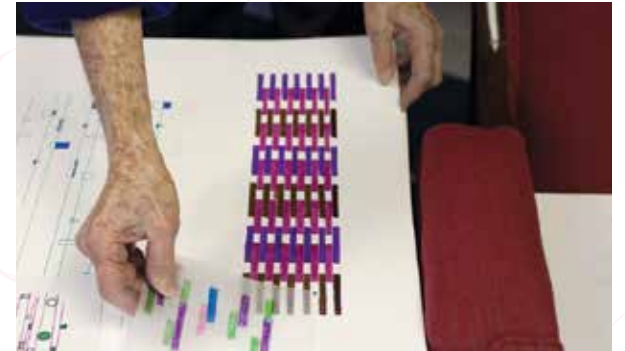
Adler Schnee responded with dramatic yet simple abstract shapes illuminated by brilliant yellows, blues, reds and oranges. Her designs had a sense of unity, balance, authority and beauty – classic qualities that later made them prized additions to the permanent collections of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the Cranbrook Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York. Christa Thurman, the former longtime textile curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, calls Adler Schnee's designs "of great significance at the time they were executed." The museum, under Thurman's direction, acquired 32 of Adler Schnee's designs.

Influences

Since her mother studied calligraphy and bookbinding at the Bauhaus, one might say Adler Schnee's artistic sensibility was incubated in the womb, though she says she and her mother differed on one point, at least: "My mother and I, we never agreed on color. She liked muted colors and I like intense, saturated colors."

Adler Schnee's use of brilliant color is perhaps the hallmark of her design work. "I love clear, clean color. I find it uplifting. It gives people a feeling of well-being," says Schnee, whose favorite colors are red, orange, purple and yellow.

Her first attachment to color may be traced back to her years at Pestalozzi and Montessori schools in Germany,



Adler Schnee works with architect's drafting tools and colored markers to create her designs.

where the expressive use of color was encouraged. She also spent time in the studio of one of the foremost pioneers of modernism, the Bauhaus educator and painter Paul Klee. She has distinct memories of playing with the renowned colorist's vivid, hand-constructed stabiles.

Another influence was John Howard Benson, the calligrapher, educator and stone cutter. Benson instructed his students at the Rhode Island School of Design to see the shapes and forms of the natural world. "Benson made me aware that design is all around – that you don't have to go very far, just put it down on paper. It's not very hard. Just look!" says Adler Schnee.

She absorbed Benson's instruction and to this day sees possibilities for design everywhere. "*Spiny Pines* was inspired by trees. *Nosegay* by microscopic enlargements of snowflakes. *Seedy Weeds* came from our garden. The lit windows of the skyscrapers around Central Park with the stars above became *Central Park South*. Logs prompted the design *Cordwood*, a recent redesign for Anzea Textiles," she says. According to Anzea's Bruce Doeren, *Cordwood* is one of the firm's most popular designs.

Further lessons on how to create great design were learned during graduate work at the Cranbrook Academy of Art as a student of Eliel Saarinen, the master Finnish architect. Saarinen stressed the need for rigor, discipline and careful



Ed Schnee with *Germination* screen, 1948. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Germination, 1948.



Wireworks, 1950.



Strings and Things, 1954.



Fission Chips, 1957.

analysis in solving design problems, a practice Adler Schnee follows to this day.

“I learned from the Saarinens how to break down each problem, look at it and try to solve each little detail of that problem before putting it back together. I spend an incredible amount of time doing research and dissecting the problem. That’s the secret of it,” she says.

Adler Schnee’s problem-solving skills were at work at the start of her career. Needing curtains for a model she had submitted to a 1947 competition, she taught herself how to silkscreen her own designs. “Nobody taught us how to do it; we just had to pick it up and learn it.” Unable to purchase linen or cotton due to cloth rationing after World War II, she turned to her sewing table and found the solution: tailor’s canvas, composed of mohair and cotton, used to stiffen men’s lapels. “I thought that was a beautiful texture to print on and it was cheap, very cheap. The little mohair threads from the tailor’s canvas showed and created a lovely texture,” she says. She also used sailcloth, which absorbed the dyes without obscuring the texture of the fabric. It proved so durable that draperies printed with her *Swizzles* pattern still hang in the Sherwood Forest branch of the Detroit Public Library after 70 years.

Adler Schnee worked through one problem after another. One issue proved intractable, however: her critically acclaimed designs weren’t selling. Despite the media’s enthusiastic response to her early designs, interior designers preferred traditional graphics or French provincial designs and most of the era’s modernist architects didn’t want any sort of decorative material to alter their austere spaces.

“In the 1950s, purist architects just wanted the space. They were more interested in the inherent nature of the materials, i.e., the wood grain, the ribbing of grass cloth, the intrinsic texture of the material rather than the applied. I felt something should relieve that emptiness. I felt it was important to have shapes and color, which would contrast the empty white spaces,” she says.

Her designs would eventually find favor with a number of architects. Adler Schnee designed fabrics for the Buckminster Fuller redesign of the Ford Rotunda in Dearborn, Michigan, and for residential and commercial commissions by Paul Rudolph and Minoru Yamasaki. Louis Redstone repeatedly used her work for his buildings in the metropolitan Detroit area, and hung her dramatic 1950 design, *Wireworks* (inspired by a visit to Alexander Calder’s studio), in his personal office.

Process

As a textile designer, Adler Schnee doesn’t stray far from her initial architectural training at Cranbrook. In an interview for the Smithsonian Archives, she recalled, “Those early fabrics were designed with the T-square and the triangle because they had to be cut out of film to be adhered to the – we didn’t use silk in the screens; we used organdy. Those were my tools and that’s how the designs came about. Other textile designers used a more painterly approach. I’m not a painter; I’m an architectural designer. The crispness of the shape is what I looked for in those days.”

Her husband and partner, Edward Schnee, was integral to her developing process. Ed Schnee generally named each design, giving it a familiar if fanciful title. He helped silkscreen the fabric. He also brought a second pair of eyes to his wife’s work. His suggestion that she might simplify the design *Germination* helped birth the design *Strata*, which won the 1950 International Celanese Corporation Prize and further solidified Adler Schnee’s position in the textile-design world.

The natural world continues to be a source of inspiration. On her walks, Adler Schnee’s eye is drawn to the seedpods dangling off dried grasses, or the line of a bare branch. Back at home she uses colored ink as the first step in capturing a new design. She continues to develop the drawing, adding repeats until, she says, “It feels really right.”

Anzea

Fast forward to 1992. Mitzi Mills, the president of Anzea, a Texas-based contract upholstery company, met Adler Schnee and asked to view her archival designs in hopes of working with an American textile designer.

“Eddie and I just grabbed samples that had been with salesmen. Mitzi took each one of them and said, ‘This is exactly what I’m looking for.’” Ruth was appalled. “Those designs never sold and if I’m going to work for you, I would like to create new designs which will sell,” Adler Schnee recounted in her Smithsonian interview. Instead of the three designs Mills suggested, Adler Schnee submitted 10, all of which Anzea purchased.

The collaboration would prove successful, with designs from Adler Schnee’s first collection for Anzea winning the coveted Good Design Award from the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design. Next came the challenge of translating Adler Schnee’s archival designs into jacquard woven fabrics – each had to be rethought as a flat image and reinterpreted as a textural construction. According to Adler Schnee, “designing for drapery fabrics, the graphics would create an undulating presence. The sheerness of the fabric, combined with the print, enhanced the design, gave it depth. *Strata* was really designed and printed on specific fabric to give it dimension when it drapes – to give it a sculptural quality.”

The 20-year association between Anzea and Adler Schnee has flourished. She has created 38 textile designs for Anzea, which has shipped about a million yards of fabric from the Ruth Adler Schnee collection. Two designs have been especially popular: *Strings and Things* and *Cordwood*. Her latest designs, *Play Ball* (2011), *Pogo Sticks* (2014) and *Rock Candy* (2014), can be seen on Anzea’s website (www.anzea.com). And, in response to demand, the *Rock Candy* pattern has been translated into a silk foulard scarf.

The designs are still not printed in the primary colors Adler Schnee loves. But the designer and manufacturer

have reached a solution: “We use clear colors, but they are fairly well subdued. I hope someday the American public will come around to my way of thinking.”

Knoll

At the age of 89, when most people’s careers are but a memory, Adler Schnee signed a 20-year contract with Knoll, the legendary modern furniture and textile design company. Knoll’s line of furnishings includes the work of Harry Bertoia, Florence Knoll, Eero Saarinen (Eliel Saarinen’s son) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Joining the Knoll line of designers brought her full circle to her Cranbrook days.

Knoll’s textile-design team worked with Adler Schnee to translate two of her archival designs – *Strata* and *Fission Chips* – into woven fabric for hospital privacy curtains. *Strata*, like the layering of the earth and sky she’d first seen on her Arizona honeymoon, ran horizontally. Due to proven patient needs, Knoll sought permission to alter the pattern so that it played vertically and is double-sided.

Ruth Adler Schnee’s life and work epitomizes the German aphorism that hard work brings good luck. Still vigorous, still creating new designs in her ninth decade, she says, “I still work the same way. I do things over and over and over again until I’m convinced of the validity of my own statement. I bring a certain discipline to my work. If I’ve solved all the problems, the design will stand on its’ own.” 🍷

R.F. Levine writes about the arts and the environment. She lives in northwestern Pennsylvania with her family.

The Fabric of Her Life: A Timeline

Ruth Adler Schnee's textile designs through the decades reflect her contemporary spirit and devotion to color and line.

**“The details are not
the details. They make
the design.”**

– Charles Eames, designer

During her long career, Ruth Adler Schnee has realized the translation of scores of her designs into silkscreened, woven and sheer textiles, often reworking, rethinking and renewing her designs in the process.

Silkscreening techniques developed by Adler Schnee and her husband, Edward Schnee, produced her early textile designs, which were brought to market by the couple through their eponymous firm in the 1940s and '50s.

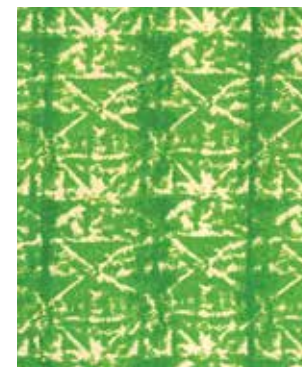
The 1990s brought renewed interest in midcentury modern design and, with it, a commercial renaissance of Adler Schnee's designs. She has since embarked upon successful collaborations with several prominent contract design textile firms, including Unika Vaev in 1992 and, as of 2012, Knoll

Textiles, which has reissued two of her best-known designs – *Fission Chips* and *Strata* – for the health care industry.

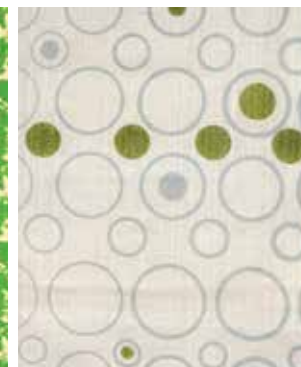
Adler Schnee's most significant partnership is with Anzea Textiles. She entered into a relationship with the Fort Worth, Texas, company in 1994. Anzea has since reissued many of Adler Schnee's iconic prints in the form of woven upholstery fabrics and introduced her new designs in more than 60 colorways. Their collaboration has proved extremely successful, with Adler Schnee's *Bells* and *Threads* winning the Good Design Award from the Chicago Athenaeum in 1995.

Here, a timeline of Ruth Adler Schnee's textile designs produced from the 1940s through 2015.

1940s



Batik
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates



Cordwood
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Bugs in Booby Traps
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Courtesy The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Liliane and David M. Stewart Collection, gift of the American Friends of Canada through the generosity of Geoffrey N. Bradfield. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Giles Rivest.)



Busy Bye Ways
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates

Pits and Pods, 1947. (Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy Cranbrook Art Museum.)

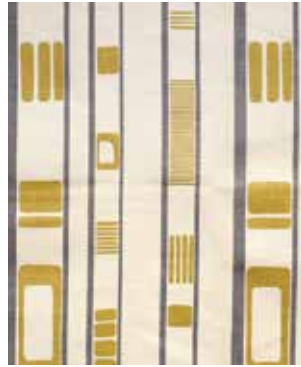
1940s



Pits and Pods
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.)



Slinky Shadows
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates



Slits and Slats
1947
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



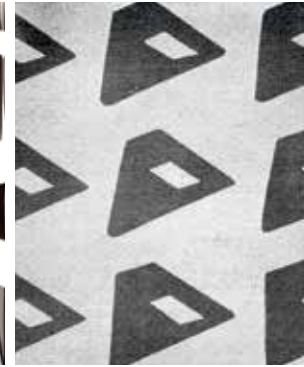
Beans and Bones
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates



Busy Bye Ways Echo
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Linen, plain weave; screen printed, 93.5 x 135.5 cm. Gift of Ruth Adler Schnee and Edward Schnee, 1985.651, © The Art Institute of Chicago.)



Cross-Section
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Cyclops
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Driftwood
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates



Cuneiforms
1948-49
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.)



Germination
1948
Adler-Schnee Associates
1994 reissue: Unika Vaev
(Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.)



Fancy Free
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and Tim Thayer, courtesy of Cranbrook Art Museum.)



Humpty Dumpty
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates



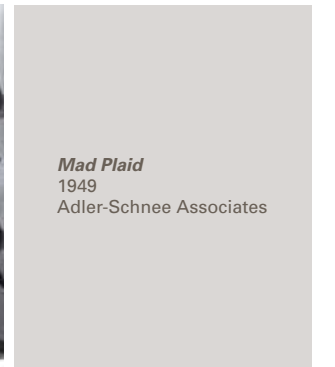
Keys
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates
(© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)



Lines and Logs
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates



Little Men with Bird
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates



Mad Plaid
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates

1950s



Pebbles
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates



Pins and Needles
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates



Spiny Pines
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates
2002 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Swizzles
1949
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Linen, plain weave; screen printed, 310 x 135.2 cm. Gift of Ruth Adler Schnee and Edward Schnee, 1985.678, © The Art Institute of Chicago.)



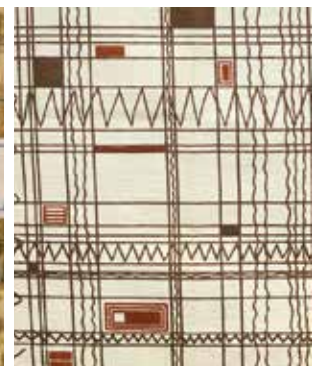
Strata
1949: printed burlap wallpaper
1950: drapery fabric
Winner: International Celanese Corporation Prize
Adler-Schnee Associates
2009: RISD wrapping paper
2013 reissue: KnollTextiles



Door to Door
Late 1940s-50s
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Loopholes
Late 1940s-50s
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Cotton and polyester, plain weave; screen printed, 960.9 x 132.2 cm. Gift of Ruth Adler Schnee and Edward Schnee, 1985.665, © The Art Institute of Chicago.)

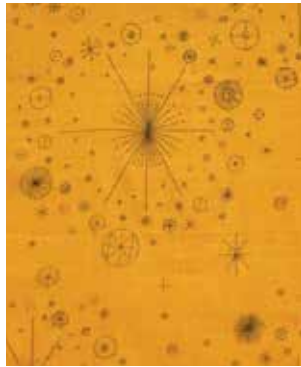


Construction
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates

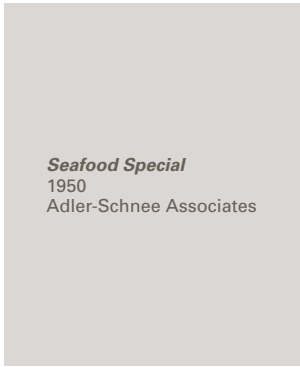
1950s



Lamplights
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates



Nosegay
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates
1993 reissue: Unika Vaev



Seafood Special
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates



Ship Shape
1950
Adler-Schnee Associate



Stretch-a-Point
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates



Swirl Sock
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates



Wireworks
1950
Adler-Schnee Associates
2002 reissue: Anzea Textiles
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives,
The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee
Papers.)



Backgammon
1951
Adler-Schnee Associates
(Photograph by R.H. Hensleigh and
Tim Thayer, courtesy of Cranbrook Art
Museum.)



Country Fair
1951
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Sticks and Stones
1951
Adler-Schnee Associates



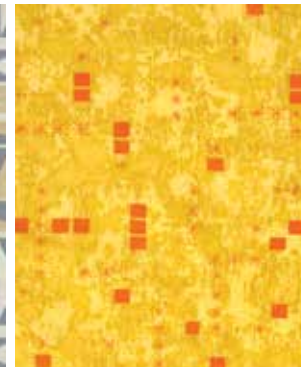
Strata Echo
1951
Adler-Schnee Associates



Suspension
1951
Adler-Schnee Associates



Semaphore
1951-53
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Central Park South
1953
Adler-Schnee Associates
1992-93 reissue: Unika Vaev



Lazy Leaves
1953
Adler-Schnee Associates



Narrow Gauge
1953
Adler-Schnee Associates

1990s



Seedy Weeds
1953
Good Design Award 1954
Adler-Schnee Associates



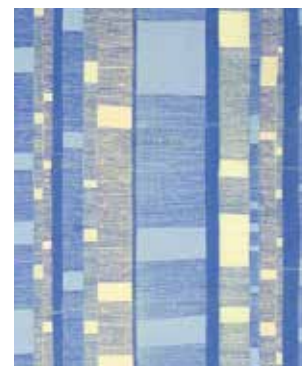
Strings and Things
1954
Adler-Schnee Associates



Bingo
1955
Adler-Schnee Associates



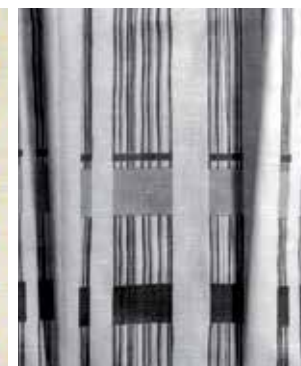
Brick-a-Block
1956
Adler-Schnee Associates



Plaid
1956
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Fission Chips
1957
Adler-Schnee Associates
2013 reissue: KnollTextiles

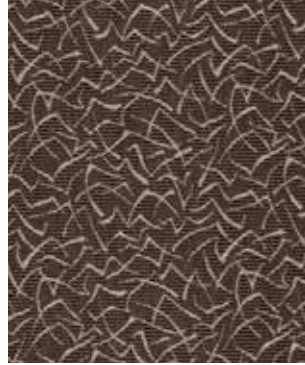


Cables
1958
Adler-Schnee Associates
2001 reissue: Anzea Textiles



Bells
1995
Good Design Award 1995
Anzea Textiles

1990s



Birds Afar
1995
Anzea Textiles



Birds in Flight
1995
Anzea Textiles



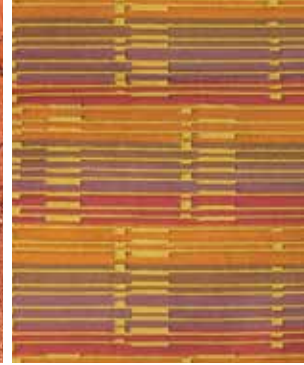
Pipe Dreams
1995
Anzea Textiles



Threads
1995
Good Design Award 1995
Anzea Textiles



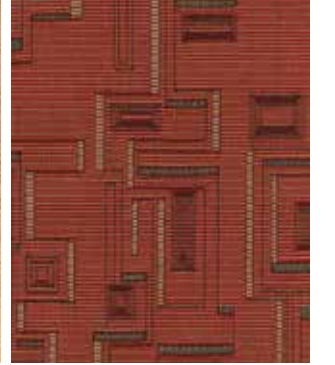
Banners
1998
Anzea Textiles
(Courtesy Anzea Textiles.)



Cadenza
1998
Anzea Textiles

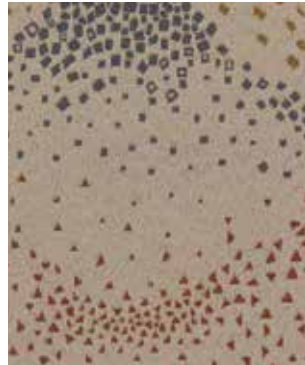


City Gardens
1998
Anzea Textiles
(Courtesy Anzea Textiles.)



My Neighborhood
1998
Anzea Textiles

2000s



Stardust
1998
Anzea Textiles



Woodleaves
1998
Anzea Textiles



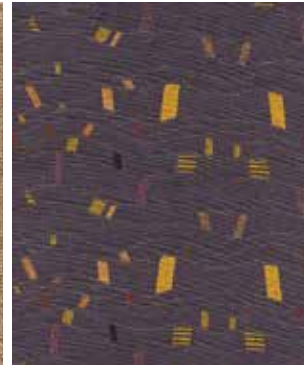
Braided Logs
2000
Anzea Textiles



Building Blocks
2000
Anzea Textiles



Delicate Balance
2000
Anzea Textiles



Funhouse
2000
Anzea Textiles



Get the Point
2000
Anzea Textiles



Jackstraws
2000
Anzea Textiles



Kaleidoscope
2000
Anzea Textiles



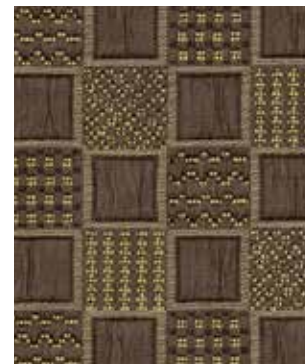
Patchwork
2000
Anzea Textiles



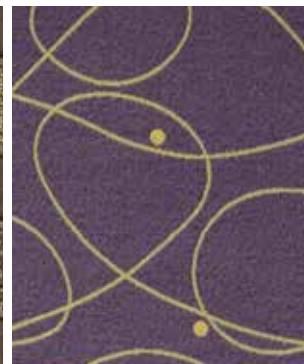
Riverstones
2000
Anzea Textiles



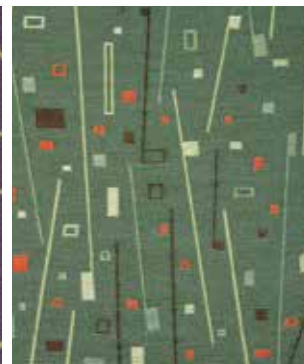
Seedpods
2000
Anzea Textiles



Aerial Field
2001
Anzea Textiles



Playball
2011
Anzea Textiles



Pogo Sticks
2014
Anzea Textiles



Rock Candy
2014
Anzea Textiles

Shaping Contemporary Living: Career Highlights

Ruth Adler Schnee's modernist aesthetic reaches to the heart of public and personal space in America, transforming both intimate and iconic settings.

Ruth Adler Schnee's textile designs are at the core of her creative sensibility, yet her work as an interior architectural planner is equally celebrated, varied and extensive. Adler Schnee has designed and specified interior furnishings and construction materials for numerous public and private spaces, working with many of the masters of modern architectural design, including Albert Kahn, Frank Lloyd Wright, Paul Rudolph, Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki and Clifford Wright.

Adler Schnee's most significant commissions have included the Ford Rotunda Auditorium in Dearborn, Michigan, the World Trade Center in New York, the Feld-Weisberg Clinic in Detroit and the Fleischman Residence, a home for Jewish elderly in West Bloomfield, Michigan, created in collaboration with her husband, Edward Schnee.

"We all make our own environment in which we are comfortable," says Adler Schnee, "and beauty is a great part of it."



Display living room created by Ruth Adler Schnee as a project at Rhode Island School of Design, 1945. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Selected Architects (In collaboration)

- | | |
|---|--|
| Arai & Hummel
Detroit, Michigan | Leonard Siegel
Detroit, Michigan |
| Tivadar Balogh
Ann Arbor, Michigan | Clifford Wright
Detroit, Michigan |
| George B. Brigham
Ann Arbor, Michigan | Frank Lloyd Wright
Taliesin, Spring Green,
Wisconsin |
| James Conn
Detroit, Michigan | Minoru Yamasaki
Detroit, Michigan |
| Louis DesRosiers
Detroit, Michigan | |
| Alden Dow
Midland, Michigan | |
| Green & Savin
Detroit, Michigan | |
| Albert Kahn Associates
Detroit, Michigan | |
| Burton Kampner
Detroit, Michigan | |
| King & Lewis
Detroit, Michigan | |
| KKE Architects
Minneapolis, Minnesota | |
| Raymond Loewy
New York, New York | |
| Louis Redstone
Detroit, Michigan | |
| Paul Rudolph
Sarasota, Florida | |

"Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilized society."

– Walter Gropius, designer, Bauhaus founder



Left: Ford Rotunda auditorium stage drapery; center: Ford Rotunda private office drapery; right: Rotunda auditorium backdrop drapery.



Selected Public Commissions

Ford Rotunda and Buckminster Fuller Dome

Ford Motor Company
Dearborn, Michigan

In 1952, Harley Melzian of Detroit's W.B. Ford Design Associates commissioned Adler-Schnee Associates to design silkscreened textiles for several drapery installations to be hung in the newly restored Ford Rotunda at Greenfield Village, Henry Ford Museum. The Schnees were excited to work with them and with "Bucky" Fuller, whom they admired greatly. Fuller had designed the geodesic dome for the Rotunda – it was the first commercial application of the experimental dome, which inspired a plethora of inventive custom designs in this landmark project.

"When it came to the auditorium drapery, I developed 'designer's block,'" remembers Adler Schnee. "I could not produce anything I felt could meet the high expectations of such an important commission. Eddie came to the rescue and suggested the use of the name 'Ford,' repeated in script form through the cloth. It was an easy sell – the Ford executives enthusiastically approved it. To my horror, at the opening, I discovered the drapery workroom had not realized the proper application. They had sewn the fabric with the name upside down. It did not diminish the general exuberance of the occasion."

"Bucky Fuller had his problem, too," continues Adler Schnee. "The heavy rain of that day poured through the beautiful glass geode-modules of his dome, creating a sea of water-filled buckets on the floor. He was not concerned. The guests were drenched but the dome had not collapsed!"

General Motors Technical Center

Warren, Michigan

Architect: Eero Saarinen

Now a National Historic Landmark, Eero Saarinen's design for the GM Tech Center is one of the most iconic architectural designs of the 20th century. Interior design, sculpture and furniture for the structures came from Cranbrook MFA graduates such as Harry Bertoia and Ruth Adler Schnee, who worked directly with Saarinen to realize the interior of head designer Harley Earl's executive dining room. The room was to feature a ceiling of gathered Thai silk, a naturally lustrous material handwoven in Thailand and imported by Jack Lenor Larsen, another Cranbrook graduate. "It was exquisite," says Adler Schnee of the finished interior plan. "We designed the space four times, at great expense to General Motors, to meet Mr. Earl's stringent requirements."

Edward and Freda Fleischman Residence/ Blumberg Plaza

Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit
West Bloomfield, Michigan

Interior Architecture: Schnee and Schnee

"The creation of geriatric facilities challenged us to research the special physical and emotional needs of the residents," recalls Adler Schnee about this important commission. The residence was painstakingly designed to maximize the capabilities of people who are 80 and older: vision needs were examined, hearing requirements were carefully addressed and physical infirmities were recognized and accommodated. Every design decision became an important element in providing a warm

and protective environment for the elderly, uprooted from their previous way of living.

"The Schnees spent many months researching the special needs of older persons, and designers from around the country have been visiting it to glean ideas," reported the Detroit Free Press in 1985.

Selected Residential Commissions



(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Stahl Residence

Franklin, Michigan

Architect: Tivadar Balogh

Adler Schnee specified furnishings created by the elite of modern designers for this dramatic house, designed by one of Michigan's great modernist architects. The interior was a showcase of contemporary treasures, with pieces by Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, Robert Haussmann and Vladimir Kagan; lamps by Walter von Nessen and handwoven window treatments by Ellen Auvil. The breakfast room, furnished with a butcher block table and disappearing Roman shades, typified Adler Schnee's fresh, sophisticated approach to interiors.



(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Markley Residence

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Architect: Louis Redstone

Sinuous midcentury modern furniture designs were often the centerpiece of Adler Schnee's sought-after interior architecture plans. Designed by noted Detroit architect and fellow Cranbrook MFA Louis Redstone, the Markley house, in both its built and interior architecture, represented the apotheosis of classic contemporary design. "We painted the entire staircase orange. That was a brand new idea in those days," says Adler Schnee, who calls her plan for the house "one of my absolute favorites." A pair of Barcelona stools, designed in 1929 by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, featured prominently in the sitting room, which also included a Bertoia screen and imported furnishings from the Wiener Werkstätte.



Living room,
Nichols Residence,
La Jolla, California.

Nichols Residence
La Jolla, California
Architect: Homer Delawie

Adler Schnee used Eero Saarinen's groundbreaking Womb Chair to offer comfort and define space in this open-plan Southern California house, the second home of longstanding clients from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Saarinen designed the iconic chair in 1948 at Florence Knoll's request for "a chair that was like a basket full of pillows, something I could really curl up in."



Kitchen, Nichols
Residence, La
Jolla, California.
(Courtesy Cranbrook
Archives, The
Edward and Ruth
Adler Schnee
Papers.)



Feld-Weisberg
Clinic, Detroit,
Michigan.
(Courtesy Cranbrook
Archives, The
Edward and Ruth
Adler Schnee
Papers.)

Interior Planning 1945-Present

Clinics and Offices

Dr. Alexander Grinstein
Beverly Hills, Michigan

Dykhouse & Wise
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Feld-Weisberg Clinic
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Minoru Yamasaki

Kaufman & Broad
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: James Conn

Spiro, Stocker & Lerner
Detroit, Michigan

World Trade Center
New York, New York
Architect: Minoru Yamasaki

Educational Facilities

Alexander Graham Bell Elementary
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone

B. Benedict Glazer Elementary
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone

Johnson Recreation Center
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Julian H. Krolik Elementary
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone



Hannon House, Detroit, Michigan, 1971. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Phi Lambda Fraternity
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone

William H. Peck Elementary
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone

Houses of Worship

Temple Israel Chapel
West Bloomfield, Michigan

Temple Kol Ami
West Bloomfield, Michigan
Architect: Tobocman & Lawrence

Libraries

Bloomfield Township
Public Library
Bloomfield Township,
Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Fraser Public Library
Fraser, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Sinai Hospital Medical Library
Detroit, Michigan

Residential Complexes

De Seranno Retirement
Residence
Roseville, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Hannon House
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone



Scotch and Sirloin restaurant, Detroit, Michigan, 1958. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Harlan House Motel
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: King & Lewis

Lourdes Nursing Home
Pontiac, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Sholom Home
Minneapolis, Minnesota

St. Elizabeth Briarbank
Residence Addition
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

St. Mary's Residence
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: John Stevens

Retail Stores

Crowley Milner & Company
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Charles Agree

Federal Department Stores
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Charles Agree

Franklin Simon & Company
Buffalo, New York
Architect: Charles Agree

Kern's Department Store
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Charles Agree

Marianne's
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Charles Agree

Rose Jewelry
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Charles Agree

Winkelmans
Michigan, Ohio, Indiana
Architect: Charles Agree

Restaurants

Aged and Rare
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: King & Lewis

Scotch and Sirloin
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Louis Redstone

Restorations

David Whitney Mansion
Detroit, Michigan

Orchestra Hall
Detroit, Michigan

Major Residential Commissions

Daisley Residence
Delray Beach, Florida
Architect: Paul Rudolph

Fink Residence
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Architect: Ronald E. Mayotte

Friedlaender Residence
Huntington Woods, Michigan
Architect: Isaac Green

Goldman Residence
Cass Lake, Michigan
Architect: Louis DesRosiers

Goldstein Residence
Birmingham, Michigan
Architect: Minoru Yamasaki



Winkelmans, Detroit, Michigan
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The
Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

McGregor Residence
Grosse Pointe, Michigan
Architect: Minoru Yamasaki

McIntyre Residence
Monroe, Michigan
Architect: Clifford Wright

Monson Residence
Detroit, Michigan
Architect: Isaac Green

Myerson Residence
Southfield, Michigan
Architect: Leonard Siegel

Prechter Residence
Grosse Ile, Michigan
Architect: Louis DesRosiers

Rosenthal Residence
Franklin, Michigan
Architect: James Conn

Sherr Residence
Southfield, Michigan
Architect: James Conn

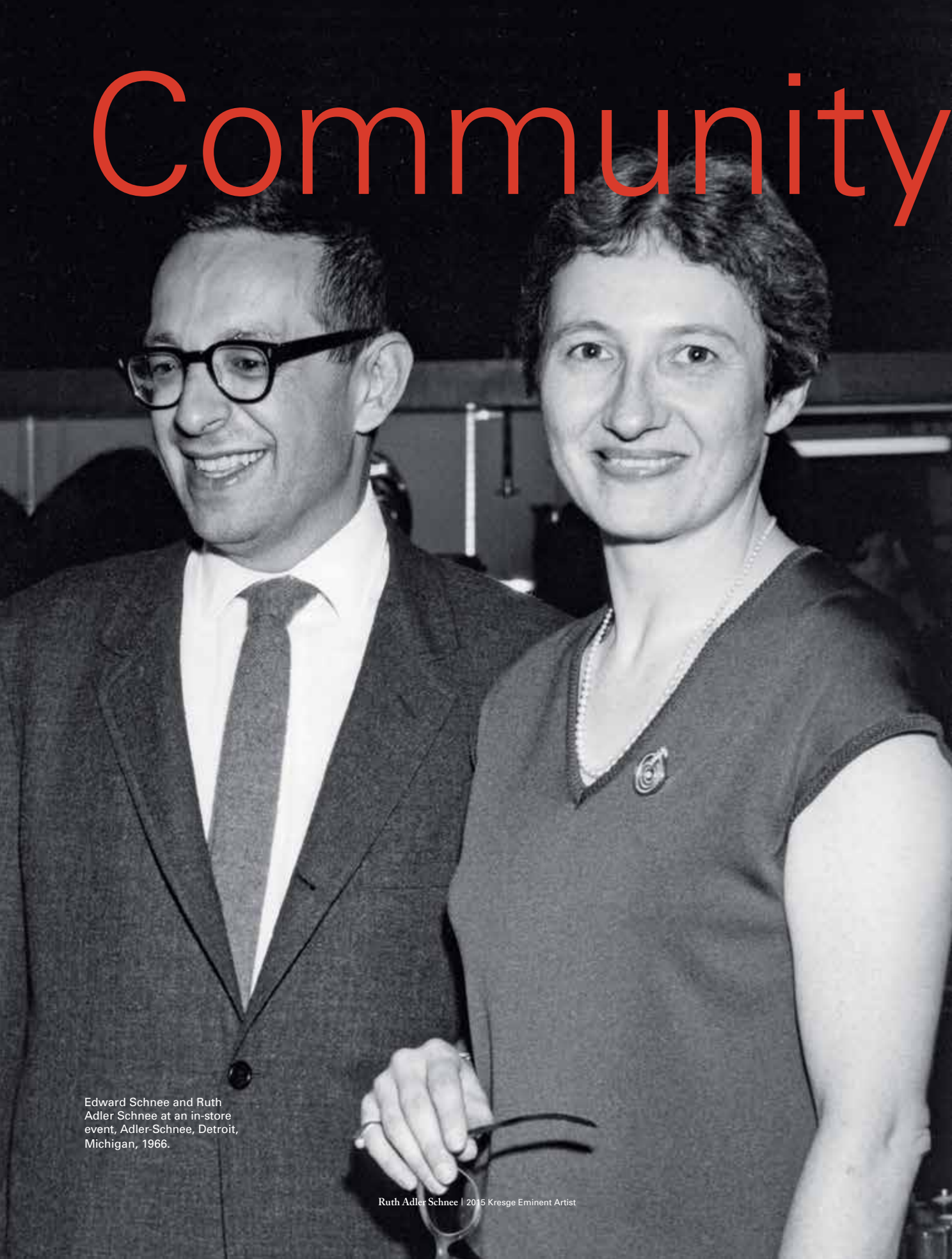
Stahl Residence
Franklin, Michigan
Architect: Tivadar Balogh

West Residence
Okemos, Michigan
Architects: Arai & Hummel

White Residence
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Architect: George Brigham

Zeman Residence
Franklin, Michigan
Architect: Burton Kampner

Community



Edward Schnee and Ruth Adler Schnee at an in-store event, Adler-Schnee, Detroit, Michigan, 1966.

Ruth Adler Schnee | 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist

Between Two Worlds Glen Mannisto

Contemporary and charming, Adler-Schnee in Harmonie Park offered the best of the new in one of Detroit's Old World neighborhood settings.

When Ruth and Edward Schnee decided, in 1964, to relocate their modern design store from Livernois Avenue to Harmonie Park in downtown Detroit, some of their supporters and business associates considered it an unwise move. Livernois, dubbed the "Avenue of Fashion," had somewhat supplanted downtown, with a collection of exclusive clothiers, art galleries and restaurants supported by upper-middle-class neighbors. It was a prime location for a store specializing in unique, modern home furnishings, housewares and accessories.

The Schnees already had spent at least 15 years attempting to promote a new sensibility on Livernois Avenue with two contemporary furnishing stores and Ruth's accomplishments as an interior architect and textile designer. Throughout their careers, they had battled to bring modernism to Detroiters. As Ruth recalls, "my mother (a Bauhaus student and modernist) was shocked upon arriving in Detroit in 1939 that there wasn't one modern painting in the entire Detroit Institute of Arts."

In 1964, as black Americans continued to migrate to jobs in the auto industry, Detroit was in a profound transition. The suburbs exploded into a maze of bedroom communities, with European nationalities segregated into various districts. The J.L. Hudson Company, the 14-story department store that had been the foundation of downtown shopping, responded by building Northland. This first of three satellite stores anchored the largest open-air shopping mall in the world. Designed by Viennese-born architect Victor Gruen in 1954, it was a spectacular expression of the growth of America's postwar consumer society.

Harmonie Park, on the other hand, was a small triangle of city space with a fountain surrounded by charming, turn-of-the-century buildings that exuded Detroit history. So it is ironic that instead of going with the new, modern direction of the city, the Schnees returned to an Old World setting to promote contemporary design. Eddie convinced Hudson's to finance the remodeling of its former appliance repair shop. He envisioned Hudson's as the Goliath of retail shopping

in Detroit, while their unassuming mom and pop store of avant-garde merchandise would be David.

At the beginning of the 19th century, using Paris and Washington as templates, Michigan Territory Chief Justice Augustus Woodward designed Detroit as a series of radiating spokes and connecting circles. The result was a European-styled city with small parks or greens, like Harmonie Park, used for social relaxation. The design of Detroit remains one of the city's unheralded characteristics.

Situated in the garment district, where émigré tailors, leather tanneries and breweries had congregated, the Harmonie Park area had been originally inhabited by German immigrants. The Harmonie Club, a German social organization, was built at the park. Singing beloved romantic German lieder, or art songs, was a pastime.

So for a shopper to walk into a landscape like Harmonie Park and discover this store run by a European woman representing modern design was an unanticipated cultural surprise. Eddie stocked everything: brilliantly colored Dansk and Copco cookware were new to Detroit retail. Italian designer Gio Ponti's flatware for Krupp was an eye opener. Sleek Rosenthal dinnerware punctuated the biomorphic furniture of Finnish designer Alvar Aalto. The explosions of color in Marimekko women's fashion, textile designs or housewares suggested a new, emancipating domestic landscape. The store was cluttered like an Old World market, but the shelves gleamed with the new. Ruth was usually there in her basement studio, energetic yet precisely disciplined, preoccupied with her work but willing to talk about modern design.

Employees of Hudson's downtown store walked two short blocks to lunch in the park and to browse Adler-Schnee. Art students from Cass Technical High School, which Ruth herself had attended, fondled the wild new kitchen accessories and the Mexican crafts in the basement. According to Ruth, every lunch hour, Eddie walked down to the Detroit River. Surrounded by a skyline of turn-of-the-century buildings that included the art deco Guardian Building and



Shades of "Hair!" Edward Schnee's presentation of the original Noguchi lantern perfectly captures the zeitgeist of the '70s, suggesting an irreverent way to get "into" new design.

the rising, white granite International Style municipal buildings, Eddie watched freighters and ships from all over the world come to the heart of the city. Detroit was becoming a modern destination.

If, as is said, Ruth's designs retained the whimsy of Paul Klee from her childhood days with him in Düsseldorf and Switzerland, the experience was contagious. Eddie's publicity photos for the shop had the same lighthearted touch. In one, a saleswoman is decorated with kitchenware like a Christmas tree, including whisks, strainers, colanders, cake forms and Marimekko hot pads. In another, a string quartet from Cass Technical High School plays in the Harmonie Park store.

Like so many successful, creative couples, the Schnees functioned as a team. Ruth never hesitates to honor her husband, who passed away in 2000. "Eddie was a born teacher who wanted to share with his customers what modern design was all about. We were not interested in that austere, monolithic modernism of one material, of a purist modern space. (We) wanted a full line of all the great designers in the store."

In 1967, when 43 people were killed and hundreds of homes burned, Detroit's racial conflict limited daily activity in the city. However, Adler-Schnee was untouched, a remarkable event that Ruth attributes to their relationship with the neighborhood. The store closed in 1976, when Eddie fell ill.

To follow Ruth Adler Schnee's path from Kristallnacht, the 1938 assault on the German Jews that precipitated her family's escape to the United States, to Detroit's rise as an industrial power, racial strife and economic decline, is to follow the exodus from Germany of many of its great 20th-century thinkers, artists and designers. In Detroit, modernism arrived from Europe and gained steam. In 1925, Detroit newspaper magnate George Booth had commissioned Finnish modern architect Eliel Saarinen to design the Cranbrook Academy of Art. In this bastion of modernism, Ruth was surrounded by eminent designers: Charles and Ray Eames, Harry Bertoia, Florence Knoll and Eero Saarinen, Eliel's son. In time, Michigan furniture makers Hans Knoll and Herman Miller manufactured many of their designs. Within this context, Adler-Schnee is testimony to Detroit's prominent role in the narrative of modern design history. 🍷

Glen Mannisto is a poet, art journalist and adjunct faculty member at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. This essay first appeared in "Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color," the catalog accompanying the exhibit by the same name presented June 4-Aug. 28, 2011, at Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, Venice, Italy.

Adler-Schnee in its last location in Detroit's Harmonie Park. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Display of Copco enamelware, 1965. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



A string quartet from Detroit's Cass Technical High School performing at the Adler-Schnee store in Harmonie Park, 1972. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Outdoor cooking demonstration/luncheon in Harmonie Park to promote the original Imperial Kamado glazed earthenware smoker grills. Adler-Schnee was among the first stores in North America to import the Japanese cooker. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



In-store event at Adler-Schnee promoting Finnish housewares, 1970. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Once Upon a Time at Adler-Schnee, the Store

Gloria Casella



Adler-Schnee was decidedly unique, a combination of good design, one-of-a-kind style and high-quality products. One might accessorize an entire home, stock a gourmet kitchen or find an unusual gift item. It's difficult to describe today, when everything in every store seems a carbon copy of everything else.

Entering, you immediately noticed two rows of large étagères filled – and continually refilled – with glistening crystal pieces from Kosta Boda and Orrefors. The sales floor had distinct areas designated for dinnerware, crystal, linens, cookware, lighting, woodenware, flatware, kitchen gadgets, gourmet coffee, small furnishings and miscellaneous giftware. Interspersed around the showroom were artistically set round tables featuring patterns from Dansk, Arabia, Royal Copenhagen, the American line, Heath and various glassware and linens chosen to complement the dinnerware – a merchandising touch appreciated by brides picking their patterns. We carried one pattern of Royal Copenhagen that sold for \$850 per place setting – this was in the 1970s – and yes, we did sell a number of them.

Adler-Schnee had a coffee department long before it was fashionable, offering three dozen varieties of beans. There were cappuccino makers, the Braun coffee grinder, the original coffee press and the unique Toddy coffee and tea maker. It was a treasure trove for the gourmet cook, with unusual and mostly European cooking gadgets and bakeware. Adler-Schnee was the first merchant to sell the Cuisinart food processor in Detroit.

There was a wonderful selection of lighting from Koch and Lowy, Lightolier, George Kovacs, Sonneman and

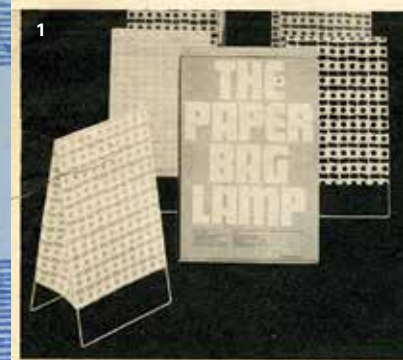
Luxo. The BKF butterfly chair and covers were available in every color and in some leathers. If you were looking for the original beanbag chairs you'd find them at Adler-Schnee, where you'd also find the beautiful Castelli clear Lucite folding chairs that have since been widely copied. The store was stocked with many beautiful handmade rugs and accessories as well, sourced by the Schnees during their annual buying trips to Mexico and shipped back to Detroit.

Were there “hot items”? Always. The Schnees went to the New York International Gift Show each year and found all sorts of things that we sold by the carload. One year, it was floating candlesticks. You filled them with water, placed a thin disc holding oil and a wick on top and then lit them. Our best continual gift item was the Jenaer Glas teapot designed by Wilhelm Wagenfeld, which is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Adler-Schnee was also known for its gift wrapping, instantly recognizable in much the same way as Tiffany's blue box. Adler-Schnee used black and white checked boxes, tied with brightly colored, chunky yarn. Customers saved the boxes and sometimes reused them. Occasionally, a gift would be returned that had never seen a shelf in the store, although the recipient claimed that “it came in your box.” This was long before gift-return receipts became mandatory. Adler-Schnee also provided “house charge” accounts before credit cards became popular.

Events were also big at Adler-Schnee. One year, Ruth started hundreds of spring bulbs in glass containers placed around the store. There were regular trunk showings of one-of-a-kind crystal pieces from noted Scandinavian artisans. Adler-Schnee even had a resident artist, Lyubo Biro, for a period. It was indeed a delight to see so many beautifully designed items under one roof. 🍷

Gloria Casella was the manager of the Schnees' store, Adler-Schnee in Harmonie Park in Detroit.



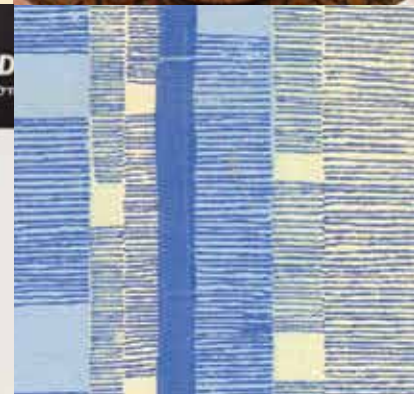
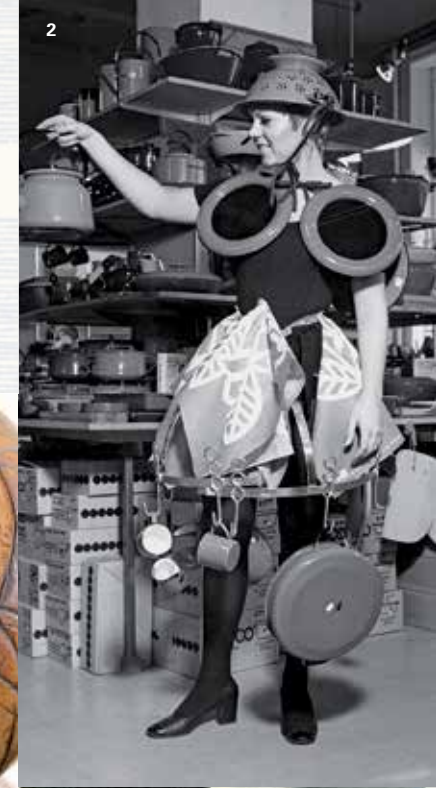
If this is your BAG, TURN it on!

Be the first one on your block to own the new "Paper Bag Lamp!" It comes with seven (count 'em) 11"x15" flame resistant bags. Six designed already in yellow, orange, magenta, blue, olive, black pattern, and one blank for dilatantes. The bag of your choice fits neatly over the 11"x18" white metal frame. [Collapsible for storage in the amusing box provided.] Comes with its own socket. Turns on at 9.95.

ADLER/SCHNEE, INC.
on Harmonie Park
Mail and Phone Orders Accepted 942-9500
(Add 4% Sales Tax — Sorry, No C.O.D.'s)
240 GRAND RIVER EAST near BROADWAY



Give Schnee an "A"
Edward Schnee's genius for promotion is evident in every ad and event he created for Adler-Schnee during its tenure as Detroit's premier purveyor of contemporary design. He consistently juxtaposed arresting visuals and memorable headlines, developing a distinct, sophisticated personality for the store – much like that of its artistic, cerebral owners. (Images 1-6 courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)



Other Voices: Tributes and Reflections

I first met Ruth Adler Schnee in 1998, when I was curator of textiles at the Henry Ford Museum. I sought to expand the collection into the midcentury and was eager to meet Ruth, a Detroit legend. Our connection was immediate. We talked often and I delighted in visiting her home studio in Southfield. It was a fascinating place, chock full of decades of her products and a meticulously kept paper archive.

While I am awestruck at the array of design projects she has participated in over six decades, in 2000 I was particularly interested in acquiring some of Ruth's 1950s textiles for the museum's collections. Together, Ruth and I chose five screen-printed cottons and linens available at Adler-Schnee in Harmonie Park, Detroit: unique, beautiful and affordable. She shared her design inspiration for each. I learned she drew her designs from the life she saw around her: *Pins and Needles* was inspired by her sewing basket, *Country Fair* reflected her impressions of Mexican mercados. She could see beauty in the most ordinary things: layers of sediment rocks, cordwood stacks, a field of weeds, railroad tracks. Ruth also recounted the screen-printing process employed by her beloved husband and partner, Eddie. Edward Schnee's unwavering support of her talent, his love for the modern aesthetic and his dedication to hard work in the workshop and in the retail store are integral to Ruth's story.

Clearly, Ruth Adler Schnee is a Detroit treasure. However, she is also an American master who has been honored by the Archives of American Art. Ruth might say that design is everywhere we look – if we pay attention. I would argue, however, that only Ruth Adler Schnee's extraordinary eye and talented hands could transform those patterns into timeless art.

Nancy E. Villa Bryk
Assistant Professor,
Historic Preservation and Museum Practice
Eastern Michigan University

This is a long overdue recognition for Ruth, to whom I shall always be grateful. I attribute my taste to what I learned from Ruth. In working with her to plan the interior of my first apartment, she set the tone for my expectations, design sense and comfort levels. The furniture we chose together wasn't expensive, but it was modern, refined and lasted a long time. To enter Adler-Schnee was a thrill for someone like me, who had fallen in love with modern design. Ruth and Eddie's store in Harmonie Park displayed the most incredible sense of modernity. I was in awe of their aesthetic and knowledge.

Until recently, Ruth has been one of the unheralded textile designers of our time. She is truly one of the greats. I am thrilled to see her acknowledged for her pioneering role in modern design.

Lois Pincus Cohn
Owner, Artspace II

It is with great pleasure that I send congratulations to Ruth Adler Schnee as the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist. Her talent as a creative artist has brought pleasure to so many for decades. When I opened the Music Hall in 1971, Ruth and her husband, Edward, were already in Harmonie Park, providing a delightful island of culture. Their commitment to Detroit was palpable and reflected in the downtown festivals they pioneered. All in all, they inspired us to persevere. Her career in modern design continues to enrich our lives. May a chorus of "brava" caress her ears.

David DiChiera
2013 Kresge Eminent Artist

Country Fair, 1951.



Exploratory drawings for textile designs by Ruth Adler Schnee. (Image at left: Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

I am honored to say that Ruth Adler Schnee is a dear and cherished friend. Ruth is an amazing person, a legend in her field and a role model for women, designers and artists locally, nationally and internationally. She is an alumna of the Cranbrook Academy of Art architecture department and studied with Eiel Saarinen at a time when women were not readily accepted in professional programs. Ruth, because of her remarkable talent and drive, was able to carve out a special niche and create a distinguished and ongoing career in the design world.

She is a master of modern design!

Maxine Frankel

Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art

As an art student, first at Cass and then at Wayne State, I was always looking for embodiments of what I was being taught. The Schnees' store, Adler-Schnee, was important because it was there, in downtown Detroit. It brought a contemporary aesthetic within walking distance, and offered tangible evidence of the training I was receiving.

Thank you, Mrs. Schnee, and congratulations.

Bill Harris

2011 Kresge Eminent Artist

The miracle of Ruth Adler Schnee is that at 92 years young, she is a beacon of inspiration to all who refuse to accept a notion of "retirement." No doubt that is because at an important moment in her life, the road forked and she took the less expected alternative, leading to future happiness and fulfillment in the field of textile design.

Ruth's role as a designer is one of integration. Her work is incomplete until it finds relationships with architecture, furniture and lighting, and with the hands and eyes of the audiences for which it is made. Cranbrook's invitation to meaningfully relate to the work and products of others was at the root of its early success, and so it is with Ruth.

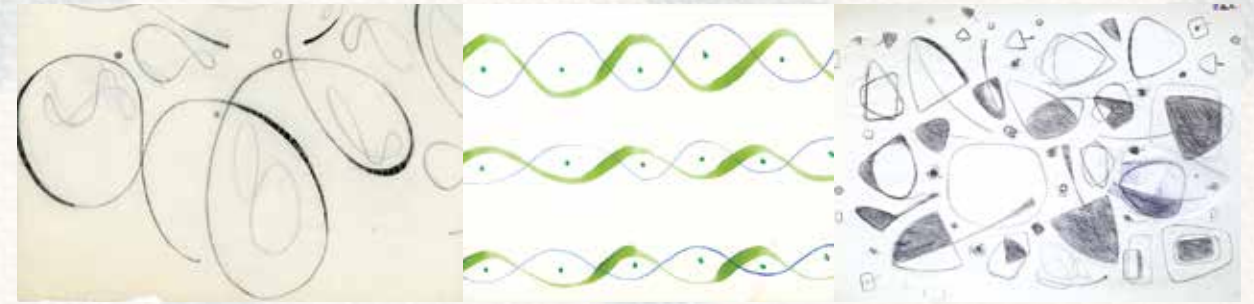
It is worth considering the endurance of mid-20th-century modernism in relation to our appreciation of her accomplishments. Perhaps it is its simplicity and directness that appeals in the context of the complexity of our times. Perhaps the language of abstraction, which captures the essence of subjects, rings true to us at a time when most truth is muddled. Or perhaps it is the simple fact that the visual experience can exist without the overlay of rhetoric.

Ruth is a designer who rekindles the excitement of first discoveries in her everyday practice. Design is a way of life, and all who know her come to appreciate the consistency of her vision and the enthusiasm she generously shares relative to her accomplishments. What could be better than loving the work, and celebrating its life in the experiences of others?

Thank you, Ruth, for living your life with integrity, and for going out of your way to bring joy into the lives of others.

Gerhardt Knoedel

Director Emeritus, Cranbrook Academy of Art



My warmest congratulations to the distinguished Ruth Adler Schnee, the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist! This honor is well deserved.

Art does indeed take many forms, all of them equally important. I know of no one else whose work has exemplified originality and excellence as do Ruth's textile creations. Her many previous awards attest to the art community's recognition of her talent. It is comforting to know that Mrs. Schnee's contributions have not diminished with age. May her wonderful work continue for many years to come.

Naomi Long Madgett

2012 Kresge Eminent Artist Award,
Poet Laureate of the City of Detroit

Ruth Adler Schnee, in her commitment to excellence, presents an enduring example to artists everywhere. She arrived in America determined to forge a new life and found her artistic calling in Detroit, first at Cass Technical High School and later at Cranbrook. She shared her aesthetic with metro Detroiters in her textile and interior designs and through the contemporary designs offered at Adler-Schnee. She remains dedicated to her art and is still creating – and selling – new designs at 92. She is an inspiration to young and old alike.

Bill Rauhauser

2014 Kresge Eminent Artist

Biography



Ruth Adler Schnee as a Cranbrook MFA student, 1946. (Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Ruth Adler Schnee 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist



Born: May 13, 1923,
Frankfurt am Main,
Germany

American citizenship: 1946

(Photo: Courtesy Cranbrook Archives, The Edward and Ruth Adler Schnee Papers.)

Education

1945
B.F.A.
Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island

1946
M.F.A., Architectural Design
Cranbrook Academy of Art
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2012
Honorary Ph.D., Fine Arts
College for Creative Studies
Detroit, Michigan

Professional Activities

1945
Intern
Raymond Loewy Associates
New York, New York

1946
**Design Instructor/
Visiting Lecturer**
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

1947-1951
**Textile Designer/
Printer/Owner**
Ruth Adler Inc.
Detroit, Michigan

1949-1976
**Textile Designer/Interior
Planner/Owner**
Adler-Schnee Associates
Detroit, Michigan

1973-1977
Founder/Developer
Harmonie Park Art Fair
Detroit, Michigan

1977-1985
**Vice President/
Chief Designer**
Schnee and Schnee
Consultants
Detroit, Michigan

1977-1986
Adjunct Professor
Lawrence Institute of
Technology
Southfield, Michigan

1977-1979
Director of Interior Design
John Stevens Associates Inc.
Detroit, Michigan

1979-1982
Lecturer
College for Creative Studies
Detroit, Michigan

1979-1982
Lecturer
University of California-Berkeley
San Francisco
Extension Campus
San Francisco, California

1977-Present
Interior Planner
Schnee and Schnee Inc.
Southfield, Michigan

1992
Textile Designer
ICF/Unika Vaev
Norwich, Connecticut

1994-Present
Textile Designer
Anzea Textiles
Fort Worth, Texas

1999
Artist in Residence
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

2012-Present
Textile Designer
KnollTextiles
East Greenville, Pennsylvania

Appointments

1952
Juror
25th National Scholastic
Magazine Art Award Final Jury
Carnegie Institute
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1970
Planner/Designer
Central Business District
Association
Greektown Restoration
and Festival
Detroit, Michigan

1979-1986
Member
Executive Board of Directors
Restoration Committee
Save Orchestra Hall Inc.
Detroit, Michigan

1993-Present
Member
Board of Directors
Great Lakes Chamber
Music Festival
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2003/2004
Member
Awards Selection Committee
Jewish Women in the
Arts Award
Jewish Community Center
of Metropolitan Detroit
West Bloomfield, Michigan



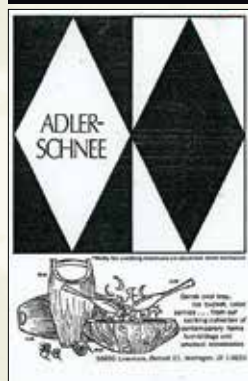
Original *Strata* drapery panel from the home of the architect Louis Redstone.

Selected Awards and Recognitions

1945
Prix de Paris
Condé Nast
New York, New York

1947
**Chicago Tribune Better
Rooms for Better Living
Award**
Chicago, Illinois

1947/1948/1957
**American Institute of
Designers Award
for Printed Fabrics**
Washington, D.C.



Top to bottom: Ruth Adler Schnee speaking at the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist Award ceremony at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; the Keys to the City of Detroit, received by Edward Schnee and Ruth Adler Schnee in 1976; an advertisement for Adler-Schnee created by Edward Schnee.

1950
International Celanese Corporation Prize for *Strata*
Celanese Corporation
Irving, Texas

1954
International Textile Exhibition Participant
University of North Carolina,
Greensboro, North Carolina

1958
Good Design Award
American Institute of Decorators
Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York

1976
Key to the City of Detroit
Detroit, Michigan

1979
International Color Award
American Institute of Architects
Washington, D.C.

1985
International Lighting Award
Illuminating Engineering Society of North America
New York, New York

1995/1997/1998
Good Design Award
Chicago Athenaeum
Museum of Architecture and Design
Chicago, Illinois

2002
Jewish Women in the Arts Award
Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit
West Bloomfield, Michigan

2007
Lifetime Achievement Award in the Arts
Nominated by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum
New York, New York

2008
The Alan Wallace & Marilyn Florek Founders Award for Lifetime Achievement
Preservation Wayne Honor Awards
Detroit, Michigan

2015
Kresge Eminent Artist Award
The Kresge Foundation
Troy, Michigan

Selected Lectures

1980
Textiles and Materials: Interior Design
University of California-Berkeley Extension
San Francisco, California

1992
Modern in the Past Ten – What Modern Was
Cranbrook House
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

1994
The Eyes Have It
Detroit Artists Market
Detroit, Michigan

1999
“Real” Modern Design
Defining Design
ATYS
Ann Arbor, Michigan

2001
Sixty Years of Modern Design: Where Do I Receive My Inspiration?
Wisconsin AIA Convention
Madison, Wisconsin

2004
Good Design, Its Place in My Life
Cranbrook Academy of Art
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2006
In the Past Tense: Modernism in the Decorative Arts and Architecture
Society of Active Retirees
Farmington Hills, Michigan

2008
Our Town: Detroit’s Development From Fur-Trading Post to Motor City
Preservation Wayne
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

2008
Show the Colors: A Life in Design
Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center
Birmingham, Michigan

2010
Film Screening and Discussion
“The Radiant Sun: Designer Ruth Adler Schnee”
Helmut Stern Auditorium
University of Michigan
Museum of Art
Ann Arbor, Michigan

2011
A Special Evening With Ruth Adler Schnee – A Living Legend of Modern Design
Art Center Sarasota
Sarasota, Florida

2012
Cranbrook Art Academy Lecture
Cranbrook Art Museum
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2013
Interview/Michigan Modern Lecture
Cranbrook Art Museum
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2014
Ruth Adler Schnee, A Life and Career
Grosse Pointe Central Library
Grosse Pointe, Michigan

Selected References

(November 1, 1954)
“Mathematics by the Yard.”
Life
Vol. 37/No. 18

Survey of World Textiles
F. Lewis
University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1954

Styling: The Look of Things
General Motors Corporation
Detroit, Michigan, 1955

The Modern House, U.S.A.: Its Design and Decoration
Kate Ellen Rogers
Harper & Row
New York, New York, 1962

Designing and Decorating Interiors
David B. Van Dommelen
Wiley
Hoboken, New Jersey, 1965

Design on Fabrics
Meda Parker Johnston and Glen Kaufman
Van Nostrand-Reinhold
New York, New York, 1967

(November, 1995)
“Schnee at Anzea.”
Interior Design
Vol. 66/Issue 14

Designed for Delight: Alternative Aspects of Twentieth-Century Decorative Arts
Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts
Martin Eidelberg, ed.
Flammarion
Paris, France, 1997

Rooted in Chicago: Fifty Years of Textile Design Traditions
Christa C. Mayer Thurman
Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois, 1997

From Post-war to Post-modern: Interior Textiles 1946-1976
Allison Carll White and Ann W. Dickson
Headley-Whitney Museum
Lexington, Kentucky, 2000

Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference
Pat Kirkham, ed.
Yale University Press
New Haven, Connecticut, 2000

Design 1935-1965: What Modern Was
Martin Eidelberg, ed.
Harry N. Abrams
New York, New York, 1991, repr. 2001

Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960
Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Kevin Stayton
Brooklyn Museum of Art/ Abrams
New York, New York, 2001

Archives of American Art – Oral History
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C., 2002

Marimekko: Fabrics, Fashion, Architecture
Marianne Aav, ed.
Yale University Press
New Haven, Connecticut, 2003

Cranbrook Art Museum: 100 Treasures
Cranbrook Art Museum
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 2004

The Design Encyclopedia
Mel Byars
Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York, 2004

Twentieth-Century Pattern Design
Lesley Jackson
Princeton Architectural Press
New York, New York, 2007, repr. 2011

The Century of Modern Design: Selections From the Liliane and David M. Stewart Collection
David Hanks, ed.
Flammarion
Paris, France, 2010

Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color
Ronit Eisenbach and Caterina Frisone
Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia
Venice, Italy, 2011

Aimee Ergas. (Fall 2012)
“An Avatar of Design in Detroit.”
Michigan Jewish History
Vol. 52/Issue 5773

Bernhard Murrye. (October 2013)
“New Classics.”
Contract
Vol. 54/Issue 8

Rita Catinella Orrell (March 2013)
“Healing Aids.”
Architectural Record
Vol. 201/Issue 3

Designing Home: Jews and Midcentury Modernism
Donald Albrecht
Contemporary Jewish Museum
San Francisco, California, 2014

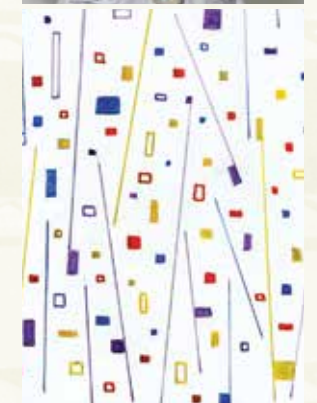
Selected Videos

“The Radiant Sun: Designer Ruth Adler Schnee”
Director: Terri Sarris
Producers: Ronit Eisenbach and Terri Sarris

Solo Exhibitions

1995
A Retrospective of the Works of Ruth Adler Schnee
Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island

2002
Ruth Adler Schnee: A Detroit Treasure
Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit
West Bloomfield, Michigan



Top to bottom: Adler Schnee’s personal library, Southfield, Michigan; Adler Schnee’s *Rock Candy* interpreted as a silk foulard scarf for Anzea (photo courtesy Anzea); drawing for *Pogo Sticks*, 2014.

2009
**Ruth Adler Schnee:
 A Life In Design**
 Longboat Key Center
 for the Arts
 Longboat Key, Florida

2009
**Ruth Adler Schnee:
 A Passion for Color
 and Design**
 Kibel Gallery
 School of Architecture,
 Planning and Preservation
 University of Maryland
 College Park, Maryland

2010-2011
**A Designing Mind:
 Textiles by
 Ruth Adler Schnee**
 Art Center Sarasota
 Sarasota, Florida

2011
**Ruth Adler Schnee:
 A Passion for Color
 and Design**
 Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo
 Venice, Italy



Exhibit from "Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color" at the Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, Venice, Italy, 2011. (Photo: Alessandra Bello.)

Selected Group Exhibitions

1947-1956
**Exhibition for Michigan
 Artist-Craftsmen**
 Detroit Institute of Arts
 Detroit, Michigan

1949
**Second National Biennial
 Exhibition of Contemporary
 Textiles and Ceramics**
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

1949
Modern Textiles
 Everyday Art Gallery
 Walker Art Center
 Minneapolis, Minnesota

1950/1951/1954
**Interior Design Shows:
 Young Designers**
 Akron Art Institute
 Akron, Ohio

1950
For Indoor Outdoor Living
 Akron Art Institute
 Akron, Ohio

1950
Inside-1950
 Philadelphia Art Alliance
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1951
**Third National Biennial
 Exhibition of Contemporary
 Textiles and Ceramics**
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

1951
**Exhibition for Michigan
 Artist-Craftsmen**
 Detroit Institute of Arts
 Detroit, Michigan

1951
20th Anniversary Exhibition
 American Institute of
 Decorators
 Civic Auditorium
 Grand Rapids, Michigan

1951
**Planning Interiors to Live
 With**
 Akron Art Institute
 Akron, Ohio

1951
**Industrie und Handwerk
 schaffen neues Hausgerät
 in USA**
 Stuttgart, Germany

1951
Design in Plastics
 Columbus Gallery of
 Fine Arts
 Columbus, Ohio

1952
Design for Use, USA
 XXI Salon des Arts Menagers
 Grand Palais
 Paris, France

1954
For Your Home
 University of Illinois
 Urbana, Illinois

1955
Fabric Design, 1955
 Interior Design Gallery
 Gwynn Hall
 University of Missouri
 Columbia, Missouri

1960
Fiber, Clay and Metal
 St. Paul Gallery (Minnesota
 Museum of Art)
 St. Paul, Minnesota

1976
**Cross Section Michigan:
 A Survey of Interiors**
 Cranbrook Academy of Art
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

1990
**Designed by the Yard: 20th
 Century Pattern Repeats**
 Art Institute of Chicago
 Chicago, Illinois

1991
**Design 1935-1965: What
 Modern Was**
 Montreal Museum of
 Decorative Arts
 Montreal, Quebec, Canada

1995
Good Design
 Chicago Athenaeum
 Museum of Architecture
 and Design
 Chicago, Illinois

1997
**Designed for Delight:
 Alternative Aspects of
 Twentieth-Century
 Decorative Arts**
 Montreal Museum of
 Decorative Arts
 Montreal, Quebec, Canada

1998
RISD on the Road
 Traveling Exhibition
 Rhode Island School of
 Design
 Providence, Rhode Island

1999
Postopia
 Craft and Folk Art Museum
 Los Angeles, California

1999-2000
**From Post-war to
 Post-modern:
 Interior Textiles, 1946-1976**
 Headley-Whitney Museum
 Lexington, Kentucky

2000
**Women Designers in the
 USA, 1900-2000:
 Diversity and Difference**
 Bard Graduate Center:
 Decorative Arts, Design
 History, Material Culture
 New York, New York

2000
**A Woman's Hand: Designing
 Textiles in America,
 1945-1969**
 Museum at the Fashion
 Institute of Technology
 New York, New York

2001-2002
**Vital Forms: American
 Art in the Atomic Age,
 1940-1960**
 Brooklyn Museum
 Brooklyn, New York

2002
**Limitless Visions: Fiber
 Artists Push the Boundaries**
 Jewish Community Center of
 Metropolitan Detroit
 West Bloomfield, Michigan

2003
**Staying Power: Cranbrook
 Alumni in Michigan**
 Network Gallery
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2003-2004
100 Treasures of Cranbrook
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2008
**Show the Colors: A Life
 in Design**
 Birmingham Bloomfield
 Art Center
 Birmingham, Michigan

2013
**My Brain Is in My Inkstand:
 Drawing as Thinking and
 Process**
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2013
**Weaving the Past and the
 Present**
 101 Years of Interior Design
 at the University of Texas
 UT School of Architecture
 Austin, Texas

2013-2014
**Michigan Modern:
 Design That Shaped
 America**
 Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
 Grand Rapids Museum of Art
 Grand Rapids, Michigan

2014-2015
**Designing Home: Jews and
 Midcentury Modernism**
 Contemporary Jewish
 Museum
 San Francisco, California
 Museum of Jewish Heritage
 New York, New York

Selected Collections

Art Institute of Chicago
 Chicago, Illinois

**Cooper Hewitt,
 Smithsonian Design
 Museum**
 New York, New York

Cranbrook Art Museum
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

**Henry Ford Museum/
 Greenfield Village**
 Dearborn, Michigan

**Montreal Museum of
 Fine Arts**
 Montreal, Quebec, Canada

**Victoria and Albert
 Museum**
 London, England



A few of Ruth Adler Schnee's favorite things, top left: bronze bust of Ruth's father, Josef Adler by her mother, Marie Adler; top right: portrait by Marie Adler; center left: Bargello embroidery punctuated with Ruth's favorite red and orange colors; left, near bottom: the collection of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in book form includes one of Adler Schnee's textile designs; right bottom: antique wooden Kabuki combs, a gift from Charles Eames.



Our Congratulations

Ruth Adler Schneé is a living legend of modern design. Arriving in the United States from Germany after escaping the Nazi regime in 1939, Adler Schneé embarked on a pioneering career in textiles and environmental design that would help shape modernism in the 20th century. With masters like Paul Klee, Raymond Loewy and Eliel Saarinen as her teachers, Adler Schneé forged a path through the design world at a time when few American architecture or design firms would hire Jews or women.

A maverick purveyor of modern design ideals, Adler Schneé brought modernism to Michigan with the groundbreaking retail store Adler-Schneé, which she founded with her husband, Edward Schneé. As an artist, she devoted her career to the search for innovation in form, texture and color. Ruth represents the indelible force of women designers on the built environment, and at the age of 92 she continues to live and create in metro Detroit, designing building interiors and woven textiles and advocating for the preservation of the city's modernist history. Adler Schneé's pioneering work as an artist and leading designer are being celebrated on a grand scale as she is named the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist.

Since 2008, Kresge Arts in Detroit has annually honored an exceptional artist for lifelong professional achievements and contributions to the cultural community of metropolitan Detroit. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award, administered for The Kresge

Foundation by the Kresge Arts in Detroit office of the College for Creative Studies, includes a \$50,000 award that acknowledges artistic innovation, integrity and depth of vision. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council for selecting the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist.

The College for Creative Studies shares The Kresge Foundation's recognition that artists are a critical force in the continued vitality of our region, and we appreciate the vision and investment that makes the Eminent Artist Award possible. Ruth Adler Schneé is a formidable trailblazer in her field and, like her fellow Eminent Artists, her career has had an extensive and lasting impact. We salute Ruth for her outstanding contribution to the cultural life of Detroit – a contribution that continues to impact, inspire and enliven.

Michelle Perron
Director
Kresge Arts in Detroit

A Note From Richard L. Rogers



Cross Section, 1948.
(Courtesy Cranbrook Archives,
The Edward and Ruth Adler
Schneé Papers.)

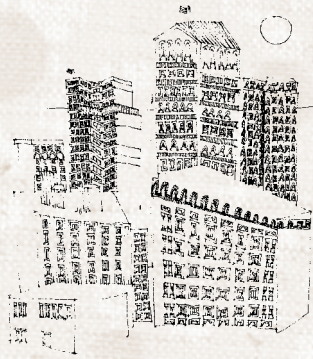
Ruth Adler Schneé's selection as the 2015 Kresge Eminent Artist is significant not only because of her remarkable career but because she is the first designer to receive the award. Her work displays the indelible connection between art and design and demonstrates that aesthetic values, as well as functional concerns, are at the heart of great design. Her abstract harmonies of color, pattern and texture challenged the purity of modernism with visual delight, while the legendary Adler-Schneé store brought a startling new vocabulary of objects to Detroit. You could say that in those years she was our own design subversive.

The opportunity to recognize pioneers like Ruth Adler Schneé makes the College for Creative Studies very proud to administer the Kresge Eminent Artist Awards on behalf of The Kresge Foundation.

The recipients are people who have always fought for the validity of their visions and, through their independence, have enhanced the well-being of this community. They are models for what the college teaches its students and emblematic of the role creativity is playing in the revitalization of our community. We are grateful to The Kresge Foundation for affirming the importance of the arts and artists to the city's future and our own.

Richard L. Rogers
President
College for Creative Studies

2014-2015 Kresge Arts in Detroit



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The Kresge Eminent Artist Award and Winners

Established in 2008, the Kresge Eminent Artist Award honors an exceptional literary, fine or performing artist whose influential body of work, lifelong professional achievements and proven, continued commitment to the Detroit cultural community are evident. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award celebrates artistic innovation and rewards integrity and depth of vision with the financial support of \$50,000 as judged by the Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award is unrestricted and is given annually to an artist who has lived and worked in Wayne, Oakland or Macomb counties for a significant number of years.

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award, annual Kresge Artist Fellowships and multiyear grants to arts and cultural organizations in metropolitan Detroit constitute Kresge Arts in Detroit, the foundation's effort to provide broad support to the regional arts community.

The College for Creative Studies administers the Kresge Eminent Artist Award on behalf of The Kresge Foundation.



Photo: Michelle Andonian

Charles McGee 2008

Charles McGee is an artist of international renown whose work has been celebrated in exhibitions from Detroit to Bangkok. Teacher and mentor to generations of young artists, McGee founded arts organizations and galleries to support and share their work. His paintings, assemblages and sculptures are in the collections of prestigious institutions and individuals around the world and the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.



Photo: Carol Dronsfield

Bill Harris 2011

Detroit's distinguished author, literary critic and educator has enjoyed national acclaim for his poetry, plays, novels, essays and criticism. Harris was named a Kresge Eminent Artist for his commitment to cultivating creative writing talent as a Wayne State University professor and for his own literary contributions as author and playwright. Now professor emeritus, Harris most recently published "Booker T & Them: A Blues" (Wayne State University Press, 2012) and is working on three novels.



Photo: Carol Dronsfield

David DiChiera 2013

A visionary leader of the performing arts, Michigan Opera Theatre founder David DiChiera was honored as a Kresge Eminent Artist for his dedication to the composition and production of new operas, his nurturing of African American artists in the field and his instrumental role in the revitalization of Detroit's cultural and entertainment district. Impresario DiChiera remains the artistic director of MOT and continues work on his score of a new opera.



Photo: Justin Macconochie

Marcus Belgrave 2009

Internationally recognized jazz trumpeter Marcus Belgrave dedicated his energies to music education and performance excellence for more than five decades in his chosen home of Detroit. He spread the language of jazz to generations of students, and was a beloved mentor to young musicians, many of whom went on to greatness themselves. Belgrave amazed audiences with his virtuosity, spontaneity and joy in performing until shortly before his death, at age 78, in May 2015.



Photo: Julie Pincus

Naomi Long Madgett 2012

Award-winning poet, educator and publisher Naomi Long Madgett made it possible for African American poets to publish and distribute their work when she established Detroit's Lotus Press in 1972. Her annual poetry award continues to nurture aspiring poets as it introduces new poets to the public. Poet laureate of Detroit, Madgett was named Kresge Eminent Artist in recognition of her deep and abiding commitment to metropolitan Detroit and its literary artists.



Photo: Michelle Andonian

Bill Rauhauser 2014

Iconic Detroit street photographer and educator Bill Rauhauser, who devoted decades to capturing what he describes as a "society in constant motion," was named a Kresge Eminent Artist in celebration of his body of work, his instrumental role in the establishment of the photo collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, his education and mentorship of generations of photographers at Detroit's College for Creative Studies and for his continuing contributions to the scholarship of photography.

About The Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development in Detroit. In 2014, the Board of Trustees approved 408 awards totaling \$242.5 million. That included a \$100 million award to the Foundation for Detroit's Future, a fund created to soften the impact of the city's bankruptcy on pensioners and safeguard cultural assets at the Detroit Institute of Arts. A total of \$138.1 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. In addition, our Social Investment Practice made commitments totaling \$20.4 million in 2014. For more information, visit kresge.org.

Acknowledgements

With enormous thanks to Ruth Adler Schnee for her enthusiasm, energy and generosity in preparing for contributions to this project. As the copyright holder of all her textile designs, Ruth Adler Schnee has graciously granted permission to The Kresge Foundation to reproduce these images except where noted.

With special thanks to Ronit Eisenbach, Caterina Frisone, Terri Sarris, Hannah Smotrich and Glen Mannisto for sharing material from "The Radiant Sun" and "Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color;" to Mitzi Mills and Sarah Tofan of Anzea Textiles for their generosity and contributions; to David A. Hanks for his generosity in image research assistance; to Leslie Edwards, Cheri Gay and Gina Tecos of the Cranbrook Archives for their generosity in image research assistance; to Shelley Selim of the Cranbrook Art Museum and Judy Dyki of the Cranbrook Academy of Art Library for image research assistance; to Daniel Walker of Chicago Art Institute for image research assistance; and to Jan Durecki and the Rabbi Leo M. Franklin Archives of Temple Beth El for research assistance.

With additional thanks to Nancy Villa Bryk, Gloria Casella, Lois Pincus Cohn, David DiChiera, Maxine Frankel, Bill Harris, Gerhardt Knoedel, Naomi Long Madgett, Bill Rauhauser, Barbara Robb and Gregory Wittkopp.

Photography

Julie Pincus

Additional Artwork

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ISBN: 978-0-9839654-4-2

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