

In Memoriam: Arthur Gensler

Art Gensler, 85, passed away peacefully last Monday, May 10th at his home in Mill Valley, California. He was the co-founder, with his wife Drue and associate James Follett, of M. Arthur Gensler Jr. & Associates, Inc. known simply to us as Gensler – the world's largest architecture firm.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 3...

**Strategies for Enhanced Indoor Air Quality**

There is now growing demand for strategies that facilitate non-viral environments, enhance air quality, and supplement whole-health building systems. Experts recently shared their thoughts on the importance of greenery, improved ventilation, and bringing the outdoors to our interiors.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 8...

**Cranbrook and the Power of Beginnings**

Design's household names, like Knoll, Eames, Saarinen, and Bertioia, have something in common: they all studied at Cranbrook Academy of Art. A surprising number of influential designers in the field of contract furniture have continued to emerge from Cranbrook. What is it about this school that attracts and delivers such talent? Contributor Stephen Witte revisits the school's beginnings to find out.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 13...

**In Memoriam: Helmut Jahn: 1940-2021**

"Starchitect" Helmut Jahn was killed in an accident on May 8. He was one of the most prolific of the postmodern architects, with buildings around the globe. While he found extensive acceptance in his native country of Germany, his contribution to the outstanding architecture of Chicago is undeniable.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 18...



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One of the vaults storing a portion of the Cranbrook Art Museum's holdings of 6,000 works of art, architecture, craft, and design. Image courtesy of Justin Maconochie, Cranbrook Museum of Art

Cranbrook and the Power of Beginnings

by Stephen Witte

Design's household names, like Knoll, Eames, Saarinen, and Bertioia, have something in common: they all studied at Cranbrook Academy of Art. Their

collective works are synonymous with Mid-century design and hold a substantial presence in spaces where people live and work.

A surprising number of influential designers in the field of contract furniture have continued to emerge from Cranbrook. What is it about this school that attracts and delivers such talent? What ethos or DNA exists there that unifies this remarkable group? Finding out means revisiting the school's beginnings.

Established in 1906 by George and Ellen Booth on a 319-acre campus in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Cranbrook was "a full-fledged school of art and a meeting place for artisans and craftsmen." That description from Antonio Román's 2003 monograph, "Eero Saarinen: An Architecture of Multiplicity," continues by telling of Eero's father, Eliel, associating with Cranbrook, eventually becoming the Architect-in-Residence from 1932 until 1950. That association began in Ann Arbor.

Among the students in the architecture classes Eliel taught at the University of Michigan was Henry Cranbrook. At Henry's suggestion, the Booths approached Eliel, eventually making him Cranbrook's chief architect, as described in a school history document. When Eliel moved his family from Finland to the United States in 1923, Eero was 12-years-old. Mr. Román adds, "There was little doubt that he would follow in his parents' footsteps and choose an artistic path."

Starting at age 19, the younger Saarinen created 35 designs between 1929 and 1931 for the Kingswood School for Girls, his father's masterwork at the campus's northeastern edge. Attending Kingswood from 1932 until 1934 was a 15-year-old named Florence Schust. Her coursework led to designing a residence. It sparked an interest in architecture. Following a classroom visit from Eliel Saarinen, he and his wife, Loja, "practically adopted" Florence.



Eero Saarinen, 1910-1961. Image courtesy of Knoll, Inc.

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Her closeness with the Saarinens and her Cranbrook experience made a lifelong impression. She would later study among iconic names in design and architecture, meet Hans Knoll, and establish Knoll Associates following their 1946 marriage. Years later, Florence Knoll Bassett gave testimony to the influence of Cranbrook's interactions and ties among faculty, students, and alumni.

"I started the Planning Unit," she said in an undated company video. "That was for space planning in buildings and to get the furniture we needed. That's when we got Eero, Ralph Rapson, and Harry Bertoia — all those people were from Cranbrook." She called on friends she knew could deliver. As one observer put it, she turned to Eero Saarinen, her "old buddy from Cranbrook" and a handful of the school's alumni.

That's not to underestimate the power of connections among students. "The crafts can powerfully influence designers," said Scott Klinker, 3D Designer-in-Residence at Cranbrook Academy of Art. "As with Eames Studio, I think what made that special was the level of craft they brought to the design process — it resulted in some of the most iconic objects of their time."



Hans Knoll, 1914-1955, and Florence Knoll, 1917-2019. Image courtesy of Knoll, Inc.

Mr. Klinker's comments come from a 2020 video on the school's website.

He defines craft as "discovery through making" and the DNA of studies at Cranbrook. Mr. Klinker cites the early work of Eero Saarinen to illustrate, starting with the seating designs for Kingswood School. "The dining chair was Eliel's first assignment for Eero and one of his first big projects. It's a beautifully crafted chair but fairly traditional," said Mr. Klinker.

Then came the auditorium armchair for Kingswood. Eero noticeably departed from the dining chair in design and materials. "He's moved from traditional craft in wood to a Bauhaus-inspired upholstered chair with a tubular steel frame, similar to designs from Marcel Breuer."

Enter Charles Eames and a project establishing Cranbrook as the "incubator of Mid-Century Modernism." On October 1, 1940, the Department of Industrial Design at New York City's Museum of Modern Art announced an "inter-American competition for the design of furniture, fabrics, and lamps." To this day, design scholars and historians revere the winning entries by

Charles and Eero. "That collaboration won the Organic Chair competition and basically created today's shell chair," said Mr. Klinker.

The evolution between Eero Saarinen's first and second chair designs for the Kingswood School is significant, but pales compared to the Organic Chair design. Mr. Klinker said, "It shows the influence of Cranbrook."



Scott Klinker, 3D Designer-in-Residence, Cranbrook Academy of Art, MFA, 1996, Cranbrook Photo courtesy of Scott Klinker



Charles and Ray Eames perfecting the fiberglass shells of La Chaise for a 1948 furniture design competition. Photo courtesy of eamesoffice.com

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Kingswood School auditorium armchair, designed by Eero Saarinen and Maja Andersson Wirde, 1930-1931, in birch with pink paint. Gift of the Kingswood School to the Cranbrook Art Museum Collection. Photo by PD Rearick



Kingswood School auditorium armchair, designed by Eero Saarinen, 1930, of tubular chromed-steel and wood with woven upholstery. Gift of the Kingswood School to the Cranbrook Art Museum Collection. Photo by R.H. Hensleigh



Organic highback chair, designed by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, 1940, of oak with fabric upholstery. Gift of Helena Hernmarck for Niels Diffrient to the Cranbrook Art Museum Collection. Photo courtesy of Cranbrook Academy of Art

That influence continues. In 2000, Beverly Russell wrote of Michael and Katherine McCoy for Interiors and Sources Magazine. “The McCoy’s influenced a whole generation of educa-

tors and students with their insistence on cross-disciplinary learning.” They co-chaired Cranbrook’s design department from 1971 until 1995.

The reach of the McCoy’s influence

spotlights the Cranbrook ethos. One of Michael McCoy’s students followed his example as an educator and practitioner. Scott Klinker earned his MFA in 1996 at Cranbrook and has headed 3D Design there since 2001. His firm’s design work holds national and international awards.

Presentations of work by Cranbrook students have similar influence. Masamichi Udagawa, a co-founder of world-renowned Antenna Design, based in New York City, tells of his introduction to the school. It comes in



Winning competition designs by Eames and Saarinen, shown on exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. Image courtesy of the Eero Saarinen Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University. Photo by Wurts Brothers



Masamichi Udagawa, co-founder, Antenna Design, MFA 1991, Cranbrook. Photo courtesy of Masamichi Udagawa

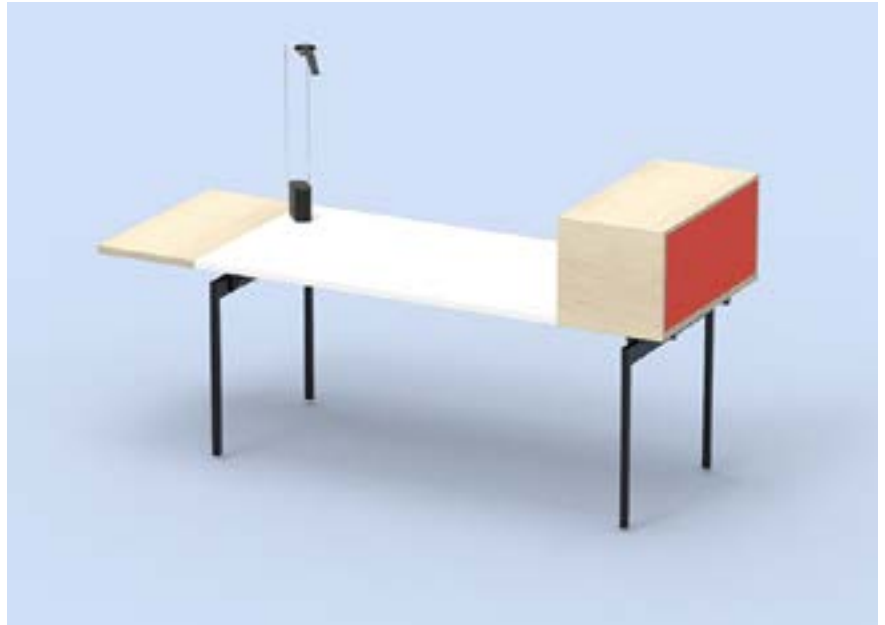
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his final year at Japan's Chiba University during a lecture by Cranbrook alumnus Tadao Shimizu.

"He showed us work by Cranbrook students inspired by Product Semantics from the mid-80s led by Mike and Kathy McCoy — "I was blown away," Mr. Udagawa said. "The concept of readable forms was completely new to me and defined my understanding of design —this encounter naturally led me to Cranbrook." He added, "Product semantics forms the foundation of my practice. Any designed artifact can be made readable by the user, inspiring certain thoughts and states of mind."

Perhaps an inspired state of mind begins from the Cranbrook campus itself. It was a constant source of inspiration to Mr. Udagawa during his time there. "Saarinen's environment never sank into the subconscious. It was always fresh, with something to discover." That's a gift to the ages from Cranbrook's founders and its chief architect for those who share its ethos through art, architecture, and design.



Antenna Desk, with a Sparrow Light by Antenna Design and manufactured by Knoll. Donated to the Cranbrook Art Museum by the manufacturer. Photo courtesy of Antenna Design

Special thanks to Julie Fracker and Scott Klinker of Cranbrook Academy of Art, Masamichi Udagawa, author Beverly Russell, and graphic designer Jennifer Claybaugh. ■

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The Triton Pools, on the campus of the Academy and Art Museum. Photo by James Haefner