

The House In The Museum Garden:
Targeting Domestic Consumers In MoMA's Architecture And Design Exhibitions

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ABSTRACT

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) promoted modern art and design through exhibitions. Exhibitions of the 1930s were marked by politically and socially minded intentions that aimed to solve modern problems through modern solutions. This continued into the early 1940s, though a shift occurred in the purpose of exhibitions in the late 1940s and 1950s. Working with prominent architects, designers, retail establishments, and women's magazines, MoMA promoted modern architecture and design to American consumers as a way of living, fully embodied in the House in the Garden exhibitions, discussed at length here. The notion of viewer experience in exhibition design, the role of the homemaker in modern architecture, histories of modern architecture, design, magazines, politics of World War II, and the Cold War are important in the formation of this argument. This thesis asks and answers questions about shifting motivations in MoMA's architecture and design exhibitions at mid-century.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The House in the Museum Garden (1949) was a full-sized, completely furnished modern home, designed by architect Marcel Breuer. Instead of being situated in a typical suburban neighborhood, the home was located in the Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Modern Art. Conceived as an exhibition of modern architecture for suburbia (though situated in a transitioning commercial neighborhood of midtown Manhattan), the home fully embodied the way modern architectural design could serve the modern family.¹ The architect suggested the design as a solution for the New York commuter, able to be built in the suburbs, but close enough to commute to the city. The home could be built for about \$25,000, and additionally could be built in sections to decrease initial costs.² The home is a culmination of the desire for well-designed objects on the part of MoMA and the architect, Marcel Breuer as well as a promotion of the virtues of modern domestic architecture. While not a novel concept entirely, this was the first time at MoMA in which actual, full-scale architecture was created as exhibition.³ The use of a full-scale building as exhibition was innovative not only for the display of architecture, but also for showing domestic objects in the setting of an actual home.⁴ Moreover, polls were taken to assess viewer reactions to modern housing, gauging consumer interest and guiding the

¹ “House in Museum Garden Designed by Marcel Breuer to Open April 11,” *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

² \$289,214 adjusted for inflation in 2022.

³ MoMA’s use of built architecture as exhibition is not entirely a novel concept, but is novel to MoMA. This idea has been used before (outside of the museum context) as in the Weissenhof-Seidlung Houses in Stuttgart, Germany, Gino Pollini and Luigi Figini’s Casa Elettrica (1930) at the IV Triennale di Monza, Italy, and the Case Study Houses (1945-1966) in California. An exploration of the relationship between these exhibitions is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴ Catarina Schlee Flaksman, “Architecture on Display: Marcel Breuer’s House in the Museum Garden,” in *Modern in the Making*, ed. Austin Porter, Sandra Zalman. (Bloomsbury Press, 2020).

public in creating their own opinions of this kind of domestic architecture. This history aligns itself with a boom in housing production in a post-war society looking to expand from urban to suburban.

Figure 1.1: *Installation view of the exhibition "The House in the Museum Garden".* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN405.13.



This method of exhibition proved so successful that it was utilized in later years in the museum garden: in total, MoMA has exhibited three homes in the Sculpture Garden.⁵ MoMA's first two Houses in the Garden were examples of suburban, modernist architecture. The second exhibition, created in 1950 by California-based architect Gregory Ain (1908-1988), was a more conservative example of modernist architecture. The third (and final) exhibition, *Japanese Exhibition House* (1954) was a home by architect Junzo Yoshimura. It was sponsored by the America-Japan society in Tokyo, private citizens, and the Museum of Modern Art. This exhibition focused on the presentation of traditional Japanese architecture and furnishings, created in modern materials. The home was built in Japan, then shipped to the United States and reconstructed in the Museum Garden. This exhibition considered the influence of Japanese architecture on modern Western architects. This cultural and ideological exchange between Western architects and Japanese traditions is a valuable study, but outside the scope of this thesis, which concerns itself with MoMA's engagement with consumerism through architecture and design, rather than modernism's transnational circulation. The final House in the Garden, unlike the first two, does not create a product that is accessible to the suburban homeowner; it makes apparent the influences which led to many of the defining features of modernist architecture.

In the preface of the monograph *Marcel Breuer: Architect and Designer* published by MoMA, author Peter Blake describes Breuer's architecture as being "the

⁵ The Museum of Modern Art additionally exhibited the *Japanese Exhibition House* (1954), a home designed by architect Junzo Yoshimura, built in Japan and transported to New York City. The exhibition draws parallels between Japanese and modern architecture. While relevant to the exhibition of modern homes, this exhibition does not target the suburban homeowner, which is of the utmost interest in this study.

framework not only for comfortable, but also for civilized and intelligent living.”⁶ In saying this, the author proposes that MoMA believed that modernist architecture created by an architect is one way for homeowners to participate in the consumption of modernism, an intelligent and educated choice. Architecture and design exhibitions at MoMA are reviewed here to understand how the style and content therein influenced the *House in the Garden*, *Exhibition House*, and *Good Design* exhibitions. MoMA’s Architecture and Design department’s exhibitions will be examined to determine a shift in purpose: the department’s focus shifted from socio-political issues, like problems of tenement housing, to a more consumer-centric idea of modern architecture as a solution for suburban housing. Social, political, and design concerns of the time preceding, during, and after these exhibitions inform these exhibitions. It is valuable to understand the socio-political issues of the time, especially those that MoMA actively engages, in their exhibitions. Special consideration will be given to the place of the homemaker, as well as women’s magazines that worked with MoMA to promote Gregory Ain’s *Exhibition House*. How MoMA engages in exhibition design, especially concerning modernist architecture and design, will offer an understanding that MoMA, as an institution devoted to the promotion of modernism in all elements of life, is able to sell the viewer an ideology of modernism. That is to say that while unable to sell (as in exchange for money) viewers modernist paintings or sculpture, MoMA can indirectly sell mass-produced products and architectural design which visually conveys modernist ideas and aesthetic qualities.

⁶ Blake, Peter. “The House in the Museum Garden. Marcel Breuer, Architect.” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 16, no. 1. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949)

Beginning with a contextualization of architecture and United States history, this study attempts to use that history to later draw out the shift in ideology from directly socio-political to a decentered approach. This study will be situated in design history that MoMA promotes in its exhibitions, considering the influence of the Bauhaus. Chapter II considers the experience of the exhibition and this exhibition's role in pre-figuring the later monumental practice of immersive installations. Chapter III looks at the exhibition itself, drawing out the design of the home and the role of the material object, the homemaker, consumer/retailer, and the aspirational goals of Marcel Breuer's architecture. Chapter IV reads selected MoMA exhibitions that occurred before the Houses in the Garden, reading their politically, socially, and economically minded ideas, and drawing out the shift in both activist-minded ideology and exhibition design. Criticism of the exhibition, both current and historic, are revealed to contradict MoMA's ideas. In the following chapter, a brief history of the Bauhaus is offered to present the reader with a sense of the history of modernist architecture and its influence in the United States. Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House* is introduced in chapter VI, contending with the architect's own political beliefs, the role of the magazine *Woman's Home Companion*, and the history of women's magazines. The following chapter VII draws out the relationship of the magazine further, addressing questions of consumerism in the Houses in the Garden, as well as gendered roles perpetuated in home economics and advertisements. The eighth chapter briefly discusses the promotion of the *Exhibition House* via magazine/museum. Following this chapter, is a description and analysis of the experience of a viewer in New York City, and the idealized portrayal of suburban domestic life they are presented in the exhibition. The final two chapters consider the role

of consumption in MoMA's exhibitions, and in United States propagandist Cold War exhibitions. This outline serves to present an image of the arc of this thesis, which focuses on themes of consumerism, gender roles, viewer experience, political and architectural history which all influence, (and are sometimes influenced by) MoMA's mid-century exhibitions.

In the late 40s and 50s, MoMA was particularly interested in housing because of an ongoing housing crisis in the United States, which began with the Great Depression, continued through the war, and was exacerbated with the return of soldiers looking to build their lives and homes after the war. In 1934, the National Housing Act was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, sparking incentives for building houses appropriate for both budget and function.⁷ The law provided mortgages at low-interest rates, presumably putting stable assets into the hands of the people. The act was intended to stimulate building and encourage homeownership. The Federal Housing Authority published the technical bulletin *Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses* in 1936, outlining how neighborhood blocks, streets, recreation areas, and commercial development should be planned.⁸ In concert with these policies, MoMA sought to encourage conversations about small housing, as seen in its architectural exhibitions. Through these acts of government intervention, the suburban development became a viable option for homeownership as well as a premier location for the building of modernist architecture, and MoMA utilized architectural exhibitions to promote this ideal form to the house-buying public.

⁷ *National Housing Act: P.L. 73-479, 48 Stat. 1246, June 27, 1934.* (Arnold & Porter, 1945)

⁸ "Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses". *Third Annual Report of Federal Housing Administration, Calendar Year 1936.* (Congressional Document, 1937).

While the House in the Garden exhibitions referred to the need for affordable housing in the United States, they did not overtly consider the political turmoil of World War II or the dangers and displacement faced by artists and architects of the Bauhaus. The materials associated with the Houses in the Garden (press releases, exhibition catalogs, and object checklists) show the homes and furnishings as objects of “good design” for the suburban homeowner, without a conversation about the recent history of streamlining modern objects or designing objects which require no aerodynamic function (as in the case of a toaster) to have smooth, curved surfaces (as is necessary for the design of planes or cars).⁹ The exhibition materials provided the visitor with the opportunity to learn where all those objects were sold and who manufactured them.

The term Bauhaus refers to the revolutionary school founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius. The school operated with the goal of unifying art and design. The Bauhaus is known for its use of modern materials and methods of creation. Neatly packaging Bauhaus-influenced design in checklists and purchasable objects for the American audience in Bauhaus exhibitions, and in the later Houses seems to make the movement palatable for a capitalist, consumerist perceived viewer. MoMA does not address social and political concerns close at hand regarding the closure of the Bauhaus by fascist powers in exhibition materials: these exhibits largely avoided overt political ideology and highlighted the formal design of the group. The museum instead opted to focus on the benefits of modern design for a capitalist, consumerist populace.

⁹ “The Museum of Modern Art: Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House.” (The Museum of Modern Art, 1950).
Peter Blake. “The House in the Museum Garden. Marcel Breuer, Architect.” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 16, no. 1, (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

The notion of the modern home idealizes a certain American lifestyle: the worker, who commutes for work, and the typical family who interacts and uses space in a certain way. They were expected to purchase well-designed products from reputable companies and live leisurely in suburban America. The home was intended to solve the problems of modern living and to ease the domestic lives of homeowners through designed spaces and objects. Peter Blake's Breuer monograph offers a reading on the benefits of the bi-nuclear design, characterized by a focus on the function of the space as it relates to the upkeep and maintenance of the home.

"The beauty of this plan lies in its clean organization, its simplicity of management, and in its creation of zones of privacy. For a small family without outside help the plan has many conveniences: only the daytime wing needs to be kept up in presentable condition, while the bedroom-play room element can safely become the necessarily chaotic domain of children; furthermore, the connecting link forms an excellent sound baffle between the parents' rest and work space, and the children's realm of self-expression."¹⁰

In this analysis, the author offers the idea that the space of the home is both public and private, and understanding those functions is important to Breuer. There is a desire to make these options appear viable for the middle class. Exhibition materials, like the brochure provided by New Design, Inc., which furnished (and sold) the items found in the home, suggested objects were chosen for the home "with budget considerations in mind."¹¹ Items that once were luxuries were promoted as the future of every home, and a worthwhile investment for those building homes in the late 40s and 50s.

¹⁰ Peter Blake, "The House in the Museum Garden. Marcel Breuer, Architect." pg. 87

¹¹ New Design, Inc. "House in the Museum Garden Pamphlet" (New Design, 1949).

Chapter II: The Experience of the Exhibition

MoMA's Houses in the Garden were innovative in that the actual architectural space also served as the exhibition of modern architecture by influential architects. Accompanying these installations were domestic objects that enhanced the space of the home, emphasizing the installation as a lived environment. They are spaces that we perceive to be more real than the museum or gallery environment. The museum is often conceived of as a space outside of lived experience and time. These exhibitions combined the everyday environment with that of the gallery space. It is necessary to consider the role that physical experience plays in the viewer's perception of space. The creation of a full-scale house to embody architecture is not typical of MoMA's prior architecture exhibitions, which utilized photography, scale models, architectural drawings, and other ephemera.

In the House in the Garden series, MoMA circumvented the issue that plagued (and to some extent still plagues) architectural exhibition — the inherent inability to exhibit the actual object — by creating actual architecture in the museum garden, which additionally served to separate the house from the museum.¹² In resolving the issue of not being able to show the actual building by creating a full-size home to display, *House in the Museum Garden* was unlike any of MoMA's previous architecture exhibitions. The built environment, including its interior objects, was the exhibition, immersing viewers in the space, and creating a profoundly different kind of engagement than a show of painting and sculpture. Exhibitions of painting, photography, drawing, and small-scale

¹² Barry Bergdoll, "At Home in the Museum?" *Log*, Winter 2009, No. 15.

sculpture (smaller than human-sized) operate differently. These kinds of exhibitions create a perceived barrier between viewer and object. They use tangible barriers like vitrines, pedestals, and stanchions, and intangible barriers, like expectations to maintain distance from valuable artworks. The domestic scale, along with domestic objects in the exhibition creates a space that is less like the gallery. While it is unclear what level of touch was permitted in the exhibition, the objects in the Houses in the Garden are intended to be manipulated in the context of the home. They are meant to be used; they are placed directly on surfaces the viewer moves through and in close reach. It becomes a space that they do not need to envision themselves, because they are already in it. They might imagine then being surrounded by friends at a cocktail party, enjoying dinner in the open dining space, or washing breakfast dishes while the children play nearby. In this space, the visitor can immerse themselves in a place perceived to be more real than even the museum itself. However, it is important to note that this is still connected to the museum as the home is situated in MoMA's garden. In this way, there is still a kind of separation between the viewer and lived experience. While fully enveloped in a modernist dreamscape, the viewer is still aware of their presence in a museum space and therefore is still unable to fully perform the rituals of modern life as they are unable to actually live in the space. The exhibition functions to stimulate the viewer's imagination and body in the space to create indicators of intimate domestic life. The notion of experience implies that the viewer participates in the space they are in, in addition to being viewers.

Experiences are sought after as valuable forms of cultural consumption. In *The Experience Economy*, a text on business and marketing, the authors express that "while

experiences are less transient than services, the individual partaking in the experience often wants something more lasting than a memory, something beyond what any good, service, or experience alone can offer."¹³ While this is in reference to economic venture and marketing, we can apply this notion of how people interact in public spaces which require an exchange to be made to the museum space. The sociologist and museum studies expert Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, whose work frequently endeavors to consider the experience of the museum visitor, references the idealized museum as a rational antidote to earlier institutions that relied on superstition and subjective knowledge.¹⁴ The following passage from “Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning” in *Museum Studies; An Anthology of Contexts* reaffirms the idea that the museum is an aspirational locale for learning and communication of specialized knowledge.

“Many art museums see themselves as rather special places, separate from the mundane world of the everyday, places that preserve the best of the past, and places that are appreciated by cultured and sophisticated people. The values that underpin professional practices in museums such as these are those of preservation and conservation, of scholarship, and of displays based on aesthetic approaches to the laying out of knowledge. These museums are expected to be authoritative, informative, and to be their own best judge of what counts as appropriate professional practice.”

Here, Hooper-Greenhill acknowledges the myth of the museum in modern culture. This image of the museum is a monolithic entity whose spaces are outside of reality, a place of supposedly objective knowledge. The museum space is perceived to be different from “real” spaces because of the quasi-sacred quality of museums and the objects contained

¹³ Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy*. (Harvard Business Review Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. *Museum Studies; An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Carbonell. Wiley. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

within them. In pursuing its mission to preserve historical objects and to generate knowledge about those objects and the periods when they were created, the museum itself also stands outside of history. Despite being a museum of modern art, MoMA is no exception to this idea.

Chapter III: Marcel Breuer's *House in The Museum Garden*

Breuer's home is an example of modernist architecture, featuring what the architect referred to as a bi-nuclear design: a separation of the home into public and private space. The home, though situated initially in the museum garden was unlike most residences in midtown Manhattan—a single-family, detached suburban home. The museum's garden afforded the opportunity for the home to be an escape into suburbia, perhaps exoticizing suburban living and acknowledging the suburban visitor. The viewer, who physically was in midtown Manhattan, stepped off the streets into the garden of the museum, which recalled a backyard of sorts, and was transported into a suburban outpost of modernist design. The domestic scale, as opposed to the grandeur of the high-rise architecture nearby, brings an element of intimacy within and without the house. Unlike the surrounding buildings, the home had a low roofline, butterfly-shaped, without a peak in the center. Like butterfly wings, the roof extends upward and outward. To enter the exhibition, one need not enter the museum itself. These separate entrance and admission fees could be paid in the Museum Garden - marking this exhibition as special and out of the ordinary. The house itself is multi-level, however, the inverted 'v' shape of the ceiling reduces the vertical quality of multi-story homes. The exterior utilizes tongue and groove cedar plank siding, bringing a warm and natural feeling to an otherwise modern, modular architectural aesthetic.

Figure 3.1: *Garden Façade*. Marcel Breuer. 1948. Marcel Breuer Digital Archive, Syracuse University Libraries, Syracuse, New York. MC-111_004.



Upon entering the home, the viewer was immersed in modernist domestic architecture, with tall ceilings revealing the butterfly roof in the internal space, inverting the vaulted characteristic of grand architecture. The interior finishes included painted plywood walls, in white, light peach, and gray, as well as a true blue.¹⁵ Cedar tongue and groove ceilings run along the length of the house, enhancing the feeling of spaciousness in addition to bringing the outside material inside. The viewer experienced a semi-open concept design in which all common areas, like living and kitchen spaces, are visible.

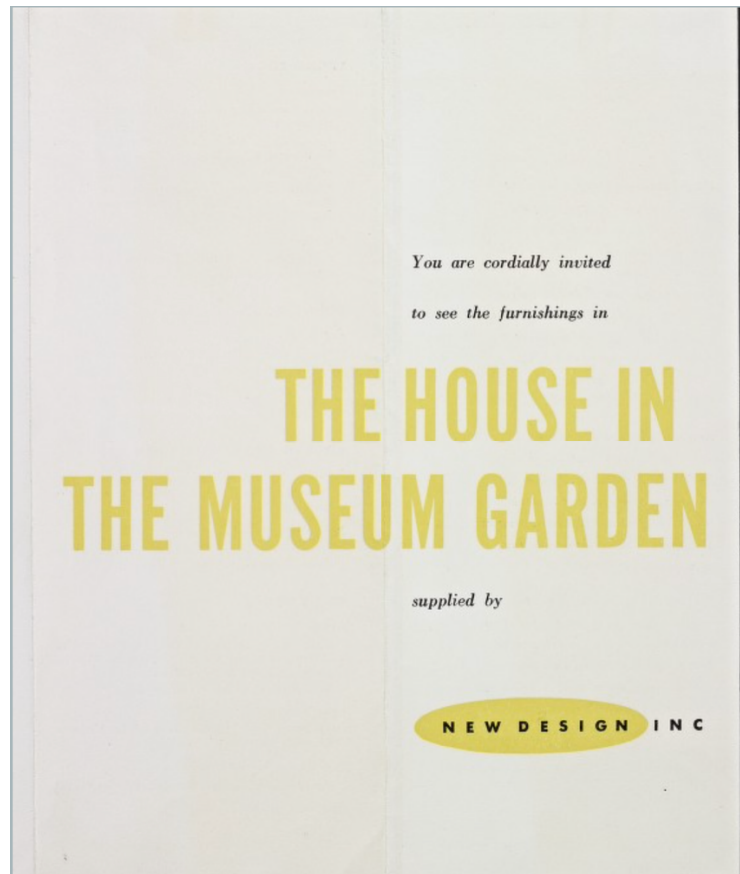
¹⁵ Marian Blodgett "Here is a Modern House that is Out of the Ordinary" *The Hartford Courant*, Jun 26, 1949.

Partial walls and a lack of separation of spaces through doors creates a sense that the space is open, but with designated purposes. In this space, the viewer was given a view of not only open living spaces but a wide view of the patio and garden. The southern wall is primarily composed of windows, offering the viewer free observation of internal and external space. There is a lightness in the space aided by low and wide horizontal windows, especially when compared to the architecture surrounding the house in midtown Manhattan, which reaches seemingly endlessly upwards.

Figure 3.2: *Installation view of the exhibition "The House in the Museum Garden."* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN405.15.



Figure 3.3: *New Design Inc. Brochure. New Design Inc. 1948. Marcel Breuer Digital Archive, Syracuse University Libraries, Syracuse, New York.*



The display of the house was already an innovative architectural exhibition; fleshing out the space were objects supplied by New Design, Inc.¹⁶ This company was a retail establishment in Manhattan offering interior design services, and additionally marketed the goods from the *House* to potential buyers. The business' storefront sold items that were displayed in the home, even producing a brochure that promoted the exhibition. This brochure "cordially invited" visitors to the museum exhibition as well as their own establishment to view the furnishings for the *House in the Museum Garden*, thus the exhibition and the interior design firm were able to cross-promote each other,

¹⁶ "House in the Museum Garden, Exhibition Checklist." (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

potentially reaching new audiences. Furniture by Marcel Breuer, including bent-plywood tables and chairs of recent design (1948) were featured in addition to pieces already in production by designers Charles and Ray Eames and Eero Saarinen.¹⁷ Breuer designed the Philco radio-phonograph-television combination in the same year as the exhibition for the home. These objects were modern in their conception, but also reflected the warm material quality of the architecture and the home's finishes.

Many of the furnishings are modular; this is most visible in the children's playroom, which includes movable, stackable modular shelving units. In referencing Breuer's interest in modular furniture, Blake states "The possibilities of standardization had been brought into sharp focus through American mass production and construction techniques."¹⁸ These furnishings present an idea about modern life: what it should look like, what kinds of materials fit modern spaces, and what kinds of objects were necessary for a modern home. Each space is intentional and flexible in its function, design, and material qualities. The architect, thinking of a suburban family home, created spaces that were intended to serve a function. The objects reflect a sensibility about what activities were to be carried out in each space, a kind of design and function of everyday life.

¹⁷ "House in the Museum Garden, Exhibition Checklist." (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

¹⁸ Peter Blake. "The House in the Museum Garden. Marcel Breuer, Architect." (p. 19)

Figure 3.4: *Installation view of the exhibition "The House in the Museum Garden"*
Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
IN405.18.



Beyond furnishing the home with modern objects, the house is outfitted with works of modern art. While the appliances and other household items might easily have been within economic reach for visitors, the modern art was likely only meant to be aspirational. In exhibition images, a white, wooden Jean Arp (1886-1966) relief hangs on the wall over the stairs. According to a loan receipt from MoMA, Breuer is listed under the “from” category and MoMA is the recipient. New Design, Inc. is carbon copied in this receipt. Correspondence between MoMA curator Natalie Hoyt and Breuer indicates the Arp sculpture was to be shipped to the Rockefeller estate in Tarrytown, NY, in 1950. We might speculate that, at least for the Rockefellers, the Arp felt integral to enjoying the home’s design. This was the year in which the *House* was reconstructed in Pocantico Hills. Correspondence between Breuer and the artist Alexander Calder indicate a black

sculpture (of which no images are available) was created especially for the exhibition to contrast the natural wood and was installed on the west outer wall. In this way, the architect seems to integrate modern art with modern living. While not feasible for the average homebuyer, this points to an interest shared by MoMA and Breuer: expressing to viewers that modern art is (and should be) part of their life.

The living room is designed with modern amenities and activities in mind. The television is an object of design, a piece of furniture, and a source of entertainment. The couch faces the television, and the chairs face the fireplace. This creates a kind of wall where there is none. The space behind these chairs then becomes a passage. The viewer is told that the living space has been sectioned off for a purpose, which only includes and faces objects which are understood to be that of leisure and time free of purposeful, industrious activity. The placement and direction of the furniture create a separate space for activities of leisure and entertainment. The passage created by visually sequestering this space for leisure activities leads to the exit, the stairs to the upper level, and the kitchen and dining area. Each of these subsequent spaces operates similarly. The half-wall and cabinetry in the kitchen serve to separate space but maintain visibility to the rest of the home. The architect intended for the user of this space (expected to be a cisgender female homemaker) to be able to see all spaces around this. Unlike other architectural styles which seclude the kitchen from the rest of the home, the kitchen is made visible. This space was intended to be an industrious hub from which to both direct and monitor the domestic space. The user of this space can see the garden, playroom, dining, and living areas from this location. In contrast to the living and kitchen areas which are only visually separated using furniture or low walls, the playroom and children's bedrooms

have more privacy and are divided into discrete rooms. This space is still visible to parents through doorways but serves to create a private space for children, as well as to keep the trappings of childhood from overtaking the clean lines of the modernist home.

Beyond the architect's design of the space, it is fruitful, and the goal of this thesis, to consider what experience was designed for the viewer, and in what context this occurred. The house is both a home and exhibition and how one operates in those largely opposite spaces is different. The arrangement of furniture and space is taken for granted as what is expected and typical of living space. However, it is important to understand that the home was pre-designed by others, therefore the viewer's experience of the exhibition is necessarily limited. The viewer is plunged into a preset space with pre-selected objects, wall and floor treatments, lighting fixtures, and even artwork. Objects are staged in the house to set the stage for the viewer of suburban modernist fantasy. The idea of prescribed space is informative of the function of the exhibition: to advise the viewer on how they can use modernity to their advantage, creating an ultra-functional space of affordable modernism. Choosing well-designed and inexpensive (in the eyes of the selectors) objects and appliances implies a kind of high-end experience as the items are chosen by well-educated people in the field of design. This idea of attainable modernism can also be seen in the later *Exhibition House*. In considering this exhibition, it is helpful to consider MoMA's architecture and design exhibition history in the years preceding the exhibition. The Architecture and Design department's program of exhibitions is influential on the design of the exhibition and is rooted in a history of pro-American consumption of modern architectural spaces.

Chapter IV: MoMA's Architecture and Design History

MoMA's Architecture and Design department, created in 1932, produced many exhibitions of modern architectural design which examined social, urban, and aesthetic ideals. Largely the influence of historian and critic Lewis Mumford (1895-1990), and public housing advocate Catherine Bauer (1905-1964), earlier architectural exhibitions at MoMA focused on narratives constructed around social and political issues. Mumford and Bauer were involved in housing exhibitions at MoMA. Barry Bergdoll, an architectural historian, and MoMA architecture curator credits Bauer for the political activism present in MoMA architecture exhibitions in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁹ This thesis will look at a few notable exhibitions which relate to the Houses in the Garden to understand the growing consumerist sensibility of the department at mid-century.

Just two years after the creation of the Architecture and Design department, in *Housing Exhibition of the City of New York* (1934), the contents of a demolished tenement house were displayed in contrast to a modern, and affordably furnished apartment.²⁰ This exhibition devoted three floors of the museum to "the necessity for slum clearance, the obstacles in the way, and the possibilities of achieving modern, satisfactory low-cost housing not only in New York but all over the country."²¹ The exhibition examined social inequities in New York City via the construction of tenement housing and a furnished apartment as the antidote to slum housing. While the exhibition

¹⁹ Barry Bergdoll. "At Home in The Museum?" *Log*.

²⁰ *America Can't Have Housing*, ed. Carol Aronovici. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1934).

²¹ "Housing Exhibition of the City of New York," Press Release. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1934).

utilized the actual contents of the tenement house, it was unable to fully display the actual “artifact” of the home.

Figure 4.1: *Installation view of the exhibition, “Housing Exhibition of the City of New York.” 1934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN36.6*



Figure 4.2: *Installation view of the exhibition, “Housing Exhibition of the City of New York.” 1934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN36.6*



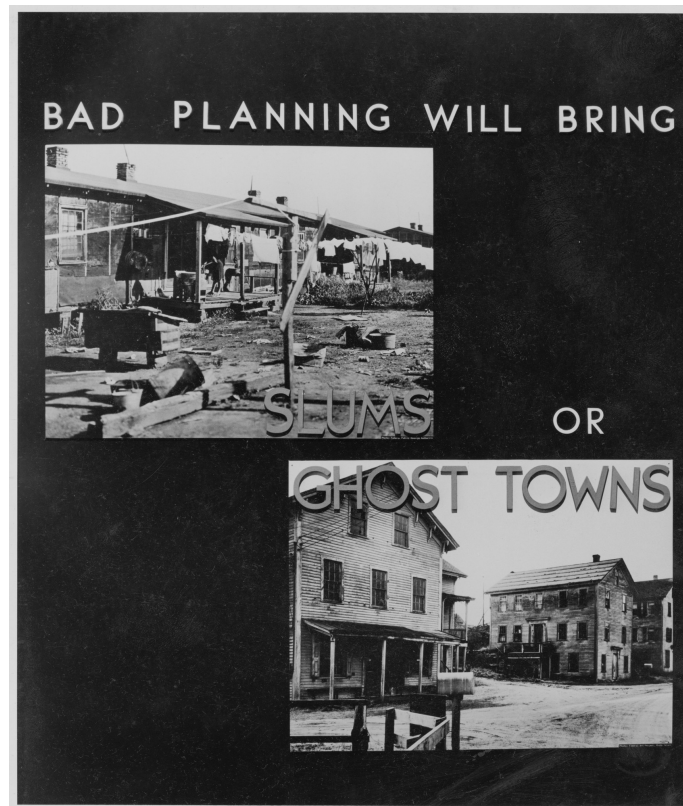
The architecture exhibition *Wartime Housing* (1942) was sponsored by the National Committee on the Housing Emergency (NCHE), a subgroup of the National Housing Agency (NHA). In 1942, these groups were dedicated to solving a housing crisis caused by the need to increase wartime production which was why “adequate housing designed by the country's best architects is necessary to help America win the war.”²² *Wartime Housing* was an exhibition of photographs and architectural models designed by Eliot F. Noyes, Director of the Department of Industrial Design, with curator Alice Carson, and architect Don E. Hatch, accompanied by an exhibition catalog. The exhibition and catalog followed a set of ten “scenes” which are essentially sections of the exhibition, defined as “scenes” evoking a sense of theatricality and drama about the images and ideas in the exhibition. The first five scenes include a short history of the war, an increase in production needs, bad living conditions, which contributes to workers leaving industrial centers, and a subsequent failure in the war. The final five scenes feature an alternative in which homes are built near industrial centers with thoughtful consideration of what housing is needed and for how long, new building techniques, worker’s benefits, and emphasizing that “good housing depends upon you, the citizen.”²³ *Wartime Housing* is a precedent for later exhibitions concerned with housing and community needs of production workers. In creating a wartime housing proposal in conjunction with the NCHE, a governmental organization involved in the planning and funding of wartime-built communities, MoMA takes a position in the social architectural

²² “Museum of Modern Art Opens Exhibition of Wartime Housing” *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1942).

²³ “Wartime Housing,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, 4 Volume IX. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1942)

field which presents “why adequate housing designed by the country's best architects is necessary to help America win the war.”²⁴

Figure 4.3: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Wartime Housing."* Photograph by Samuel Gottscho. 1942. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN178.3.



In later exhibitions, after US involvement in World War II, MoMA became involved in promoting the Allied war effort in the 1940s. Exhibition examples include *Art Sale for the Armed Services* (1942), in which works ranging from Dufy to Picasso to lesser-known artists were sold.²⁵ This sale was for the benefit of the Armed Services

²⁴ “Museum of Modern Art Opens Exhibition of Wartime Housing”

²⁵ “Museum of Modern Art Opens Art Sale for the Armed Services.” *Art Sale for the Armed Services*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1942)

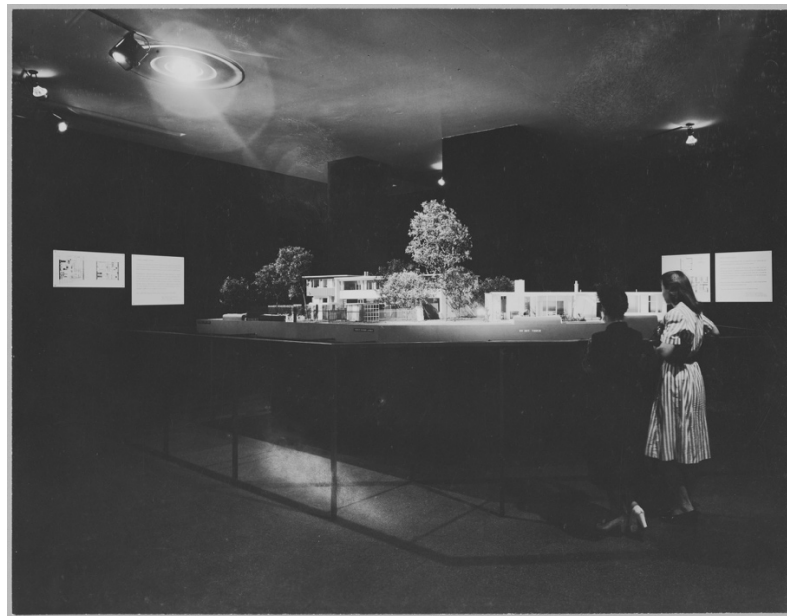
Division of the MoMA, directed by James Thrall Soby. MoMA solicited donated artwork from members, friends, and trustees of the museum to raise money for a fund that purchased art supplies for soldier artists to continue their work. *Anti-Hoarding Pictures by New York School Children* (1942) was an exhibition that solicited entries from school-aged children in a variety of media that adhere to a prompt to contribute to the war effort. The press release states: “One important way to discourage hoarding is through pictures that tell people to buy only what they need and leave the rest so that the requirements of others may be satisfied.”²⁶ MoMA requested that school-age children participate in the creation of images to be shown at the museum to spread a message for the benefit of American citizens. Both exhibitions are examples of propagandist ideals facilitated by art, intended to further the cause for victory. They provide evidence of the political stance of the museum during wartime, which marks the museum’s desire for the success of the Allied war effort, and of the American economy. Here we find the opportunity to understand later exhibitions which marked the American consumerist citizen as the target audience for a booming post-war economy.

Tomorrow’s Small House: Models and Plans (1945) was an exhibition of intricate scale models of homes, designed in the format of a neighborhood, at the MoMA. In this exhibition, viewers were encouraged to imagine themselves miniaturized within the space of the model. Displayed at eye level, these small models allowed visitors to peer inside, rather than regard from above. This exhibition was organized by the Architecture curator Elizabeth B. Mock and the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, a magazine publication targeted at

²⁶ “New York School Children Invited by Museum of Modern Art and Women’s City Club to Participate In Anti-Hoarding Picture Project” (The Museum of Modern Art, 1942)

women that historically engaged in conversations about home design and design objects. The catalog featured descriptions of the homes, and “things to look for” in the exhibition.²⁷ The press release states the models were all on loan from the magazine, and “they were originally made to enable color photographs to be taken for publication in that magazine.”²⁸ The models were originally shown in the magazine on a month-by-month basis for one year and later exhibited in *Tomorrow's Small House* at MoMA.²⁹ Shown at eye level, Mock's exhibition encourages the viewer to mentally place themselves within the scale models. This mental placement is significant as it informs many of MoMA's later architecture and design exhibitions.

Figure 4.4: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Tomorrow's Small House: Models and Plans."* Photograph by Soichi Sunami. 1945. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN289.4.



²⁷ *Tomorrow's Small House*. ed. Elizabeth B. Mock. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1948)

²⁸ “New Model Residence Added to Exhibition Tomorrow's Small House at Museum of Modern Art.” *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1948).

²⁹ *Tomorrow's Small House*, ed. Elizabeth B. Mock.

The title *Tomorrow's Small House* plays on the idea that the models themselves are small, and that architecture is intended to solve the issue of housing for the lower to middle-class homebuyer. Here we find a shift from *Wartime Housing*; the homes in *Tomorrow's Small House* are designed to be small and affordable, in addition to being shining examples of good, modern design. The exhibition and catalog are less concerned with working towards a specific, collective political goal (winning the war) and are more interested in a view of the future. That is to say that this perspective conveys a sense that domestic architecture is key to a future that is better than the past, and the small home is the solution through which it can be achieved. This is significant as this exhibition is transitional for future architectural exhibitions at MoMA. Mock's exhibition addresses the idea of "tomorrow," a sentiment present in the House in the Garden exhibitions which followed in the decade after *Tomorrow's Small House*.

Figure 4.5: *Visitors looking at models in the exhibition, "Tomorrow's Small House: Models and Plans."* Photograph by Max Peter Hass. 1945. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN289.6.



MoMA's wartime architecture exhibition history demonstrates that the museum supported American interests in the war, especially in supporting American housing needs. The Museum consistently promoted the American war effort by exhibiting anti-hoarding propaganda, raising funds to allow soldier-artists to continue creating work during the war, and disseminating ideas about what housing should be during and after the war. MoMA promoted the idea that modern art and modern design can be used as a solution to problems of housing, soldier-artists, and the consumerist American citizen. These exhibitions work with the public, government agencies, and commercial magazines to promote modern art and design as a viable solution for the issues which American society finds in the midst and immediate wake of World War II. These exhibitions were influential in guiding some of the themes of the *Houses in the Garden*. Apathy regarding architectural photographs and models on the part of visitors sparked interest in creating full-scale model homes.³⁰ The effort of *Tomorrow's Small House* in inviting viewers to imagine themselves in the space of the scale model is amplified in the most extreme manner in the *Houses in the Garden*.

Following the war, MoMA re-thought its architectural exhibitions to expand the idea of the scale model home. It appears it was not enough to merely show what good and bad design looked like in object exhibitions, scale model homes, reproduced sections of apartments, or photographs. MoMA built actual model homes in the Sculpture Garden. The Houses in the Garden were designed with modern furnishings for the modern, nuclear family. MoMA expanded the architectural exhibition beyond a representation,

³⁰ Mary Anne Staniszewski. *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*. (MIT Press, 1998).

instead facilitating the creation of the building itself, allowing the viewer to exist in the space, enticing them with a suburban oasis of freedom, space, and comfort at a modest price. The expansion of the scale model to the full-scale home enveloped the museum visitor in the space. Like the traditional period room which surrounded visitors with objects and furnishings, the furnishings were shown as desirable, like plywood molded furniture and open-concept floor plans. The Bauhaus intended to bring together function and aesthetic design in mass-produced objects, which is reflected in the choice of objects.³¹

Figure 4.6: *Cropped installation view of the exhibition "The House in the Museum Garden".* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN405.15.



One such object is the B.K.F. chair (1938), an iconic product of the Argentinean group of designers, Antonio Bonet, Juan Kurchan, and Jorge Ferrari Hardoy, featured in

³¹ Michael Siebenbrodt, and Lutz Schöbe. *Bauhaus*. (Parkstone International, 2009)

Marcel Breuer's *House in the Garden*. Historically marked as a result of Le Corbusier's influence upon Argentinian design, it was first imported to the United States by Edgar Kauffman Jr. - one was purchased for the home Fallingwater, and another for MoMA.³² In the *House in the Garden* exhibition images, the chair is placed at the parents' bedside, perhaps implied as a seat for relaxation and escape. In this way, the objects in the space are chosen for both aesthetic and functional sensibility. The chair is made of affordable materials and methods. It also appeals to an aesthetic sensibility that combines the functional industrial materials of the Bauhaus and softer, natural materials as an antidote to a pure machine aesthetic - in a kind of organic modernism. Like this example, other objects in the exhibition combine the machine sensibility of the Bauhaus with natural materials. The objects in the exhibition create a model for the kind of objects expected to fill modern domestic spaces, but it is also important to consider how the space's design anticipates the behaviors of its inhabitants.

The space was designed to provide a functional layout that adhered to established gender roles. For example, the playroom was visible to the kitchen to provide the (presumed cis-gender, heterosexual female) homemaker and mother the opportunity to tend to domestic chores and watch children. The living space was visually open to the yard with large glass windows yielding views of the garden and patio. Aside from design-based reinforcements of gender roles, press releases marketed the home to the (presumed male) professional who commuted to and from his job in the city to his home in the

³² "Antonio Bonet, Juan Kurchan, Jorge Ferrari Hardoy. B.K.F. Chair. 1938: MoMA," (The Museum of Modern Art, 2011).

suburbs. This reinforcement of gender roles through modern architecture contributes to the exhibition's message of the traditional American lifestyle.

Breuer's house was criticized for being too expensive.³³ Press releases from MoMA characterize the design as one which could be taken to a builder in almost any location and be built at a moderate cost. The exhibition house was purchased by John D. Rockefeller Jr.—who, via his wife Abby Rockefeller, was a major patron of MoMA—to serve as a guest house for the Rockefeller's Kykuit estate, 25 miles north of New York City.³⁴ Using Breuer's plans, the president of the ad company N.W. Ayer & Son which coined the phrase “a diamond is forever”, Gerold M. Lauck in 1950 had a slightly larger version built in Princeton, New Jersey.³⁵ The house is currently owned by architects by Rafi and Sara Segal who strive to maintain the historic design and spirit of the original home. Breuer's home, while intended for the middle class and attainable by those who truly felt motivated by the design, became a representation of simplicity and wealth for the upper class.³⁶ Peter Blake, in his 1996 book *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*, describes the house as “a ‘starter house’ for the sons and daughters of MoMA's exceedingly affluent trustees.”³⁷ Blake supports this argument saying “it was about four or five times the size of a typical GI-mortgage bungalow, and would have cost four or five times the price of the Levitt houses.”³⁸ The

³³ Catarina Schlee Flaksman. “Architecture on Display: Marcel Breuer's House in the Museum Garden,” *Modern in the Making*. (Bloomsbury Press, 2020)

³⁴ “Marcel Breuer House at Pocantico.” (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 2021).

³⁵ Rafi Segal and Sara Segal, “Marcel Breuer's Lauck House,” (Rafi Segal, 2018)

³⁶ Breuer's *Geller I*, (1945) was highly influential upon the design of the *House in the Garden* and was demolished in January 2022 by developers looking to build bigger homes in Long Island. See Zachary Small, *New York Times*, January 31, 2022.

³⁷ Peter Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*. p. 138.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 139.

home's price was reasonable for those with moderate incomes, but less achievable for those of lower-income. The author found the second iteration of the Houses in the Garden to consider the experience and ability of the typical American family more fully, in terms of financial freedom.

Breuer's roofline provides an interesting point of comparison with another housing solution which was much lower in cost and popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Breuer's inverted vaulted ceiling brings a sense of intimacy to the domestic space while providing a sense of movement and upward expansion. In this inversion, there is a clear difference between Breuer's design and those of like-minded architectural solutions: notably Cape-Cod, Levittown-style homes which featured a peaked roof and mass-productibility.³⁹ Breuer did not intend to compete with mass-produced homes. The *House* was intended to be the lowest price the architect believed an individually built home should be attempted.⁴⁰

Marcel Breuer produced designs for Veteran's Housing, with which Levittown homes are associated. Breuer's design was not chosen by The Veterans Administration and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), organizations associated with government intervention in housing solutions. Levittowns were deeply racist and did not permit black ownership, thus seating this suburban discourse of mass-produced homes in racism, exclusivity, and conformity. Levitt houses later adopted characteristics of modern housing, especially the flexibility of spaces (also found in Gregory Ain's designs).⁴¹ MoMA's *Houses in the Museum Garden* do not address or refer to this injustice, and this

³⁹ Anthony Denzer, *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary*. (Rizzoli, 2008).

⁴⁰ Mary Roche. "Truly Modern," *The New York Times*, Apr 10, 1949.

⁴¹ Anthony Denzer, *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary*.

is one of the ways we can identify a shift in MoMA's Architecture and Design department's shift in methodology. While earlier exhibitions might have addressed socio-political issues closely related to the topic of solutions in suburban domestic architecture, the exhibition, and the one which follows it, does not address the issue of racism.

Contemporaneous reviews seem to have ignored socio-political issues associated with housing. Instead, they focused on the lack of lamps, preference for overhead lighting, and distaste for the design of the television set. The consideration of lighting went so far as to include a luncheon discussion, reported by the *New York Times*, which included "Yasha Heifetz, president of the Heifetz Company; Kurt Versen of Kurt Versen Lamps, Inc., and Mrs. Greta von Nessen of the Nessen Studios."⁴² The article discusses the lamp professional's argument that lamps should be portable, should bring art into the home, and fit the homeowner's needs. Breuer believed that light should be cast without an awareness of the source.⁴³ This argument is valuable in seeing ways in which modern architecture diverges from traditions of lighting design, however, this *New York Times* review is an example of the type of reaction printed in newspapers about the home - one which ignores the housing crisis or questions of cost in favor of the question of objects, comfort, and function. What is at stake here, and in many of MoMA's design exhibitions, is consumer demand. Because MoMA is an influential institution in terms of modern taste, lamp manufacturers (and all manufacturers of consumer products) ought to be concerned with the taste-making activities which occur in MoMA's design exhibitions. Lamp manufacturers have a vested economic interest in establishing their goods as

⁴² "Home Lighting Debated: Architect and Lamp Manufacturers Agree Problem is Personal" *New York Times*. September 15, 1949. pg. 33

⁴³ Ibid.

necessary in modern homes. These reviews seem to reaffirm this exhibition as one which presents the shift in the focus of architecture exhibitions at MoMA - from the socio-political to one which targets domestic consumers.

Chapter V: Housing and the Bauhaus

MoMA's domestic architecture exhibition history is often concerned with small living spaces - which seems to be reflective of the needs of the American house-buying public. Small homes work well in the small lots divided up in suburban subdivisions, and smaller homes also address the problem of cost - when using economical materials, small houses are often more affordable. What kind of housing helped solve the issue of small home design? We may look to the design history associated with the architects who designed the *Houses in the Museum Garden*, as well as with other small, suburban-housing developments. MoMA's *Houses* largely adhere to the tenets and design qualities of the Bauhaus. There is a correlation between the closure of the Bauhaus in 1933 and the prominence of modernist architecture in the United States in the late 30s and the boom following the war.⁴⁴ The school of thought promoted by the Bauhaus was antithetical to the desires of fascist, racist, and nationalistic rule. The National Socialists referred to the Bauhaus school as "Bolshevik" because of Communist and socialist associations, denounced the ideas and work produced there, and closed the school. Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (the last director of the Bauhaus)⁴⁵ became some of the most influential architects working in the United States. Because of their forced immigration, they brought with them Bauhaus thought and design. Modern architects were highly regarded for the buildings designed in the United

⁴⁴ Michael Siebenbrodt, and Lutz Schöbe. *Bauhaus*. (New York: Parkstone International, 2009)

⁴⁵ Siebenbrodt, and Schöbe. *Bauhaus*.

States - those same artists who were referred to as “anti-German” by the National Socialists.⁴⁶

MoMA showed Bauhaus work in the exhibit *Bauhaus 1919–1928* in the years 1938-1939. The exhibition was not particularly controversial in the eyes of those who designed it; director Alfred Barr, as well as former Bauhaus associates Walter Gropius (Breuer’s mentor and partner) and Herbert Bayer as curators.⁴⁷ It received criticism for its organization and overwhelming visual stimuli.⁴⁸ Installed in the concourse of Rockefeller Center, the exhibition included a variety of media such as paintings, photographs, architectural models and plans, typography, furniture, textiles, sculpture, dishes, and even a film. Underscored by modern notions of design, the exhibition used extensive signage which acknowledged the viewer’s presence in the space. The exhibition’s immense array of objects and installation methods, especially the difficult-to-navigate temporary walls all came under fire, according to Mary Staniszewski’s thorough account of reviews of the exhibition.⁴⁹ Acknowledging the viewer’s presence in the exhibition is vital in creating an immersive experience, one which fully engages the body, making a lasting impact on the viewer’s reception of information. Staniszewski marks MoMA’s awareness of the viewer as vital in this early exhibition methodology, which this thesis argues is important in the House in the Garden exhibitions.

⁴⁶ Siebenbrodt, and Schöbe. *Bauhaus*.

⁴⁷ Gropius, Walter, Herbert Bayer, Ise Gropius, and Beaumont Newhall. *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1938).

⁴⁸ Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*

⁴⁹ Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*

Figure 5.1: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Bauhaus: 1919-1928."* 1938–1939. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN82.2B



Beyond the reception of the exhibition, it is also valuable to note the political status of the exhibition. Understanding that the Bauhaus school was closed and denounced by German fascist powers, MoMA's undertaking in mounting an exhibition of this scale should be considered an endorsement of Bauhaus principles and an indictment of Nazi censorship. *Bauhaus 1919-1928* then reveals itself to be far more complicated than a question of aesthetic or functional value; it becomes political. Importing art from Germany was difficult, but the museum promoted Bauhaus-designed objects at a time when those artists and architects were often in physical danger because of their ideas.

MoMA administrators were directly involved in helping many artists emigrate.⁵⁰ In doing so, MoMA was clearly in opposition to Nazi cultural policy even before the United States was directly involved in World War II.

MoMA later presents the actual artifact of architecture by those closely associated with the Bauhaus and International Style of architecture, named for the 1932 MoMA architecture exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, curated by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. (Breuer attended and taught at Bauhaus⁵¹, and Ain was greatly influenced by Richard Neutra,⁵² known for combining International and Bauhaus styles in mid-century architecture). These architects and their work adhere to the aesthetic tenets of the Bauhaus school. Yet, they have been applied to suburban domestic housing, a social issue in post-war United States. The relationship of modernism with the Bauhaus school, the museum's propagandist and pro-Allied exhibition history, and the subsequent choice of architects in the first two installations in the *House in the Garden* exhibitions point to an interest in a narrative that aligns good design with the school. It could also be considered that MoMA utilized a style that is antithetical to the fascist regime as a symbol of victory - in war and art. Promoting Bauhaus ideals directly counters dictatorships that sought to oppress democracy and the freedom of expression.

MoMA utilizes objects of the Bauhaus, in addition to those which fall into the legacy of Bauhaus design in the domestic space of the *House in the Garden*, and in the promotion of modern living in other Architecture and Design department exhibitions. Art historian Mary Staniszewski marks MoMA's *Useful Objects* exhibitions, a series of

⁵⁰ Staniszewski. *The Power of Display*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Anthony Denzer, *Gregory Ain: the Modern Home as Social Commentary*.

exhibitions that displayed design objects under a certain price (which fluctuated year to year) as successful because they foregrounded the visitor's identity as a consumer.⁵³ Staniszewski argues that "the show's success was secured by foregrounding the visitor's role as a consumer and by presenting modern culture as modest, down-home, democratic housewares."⁵⁴ It might then be argued that the success of the *House in the Museum Garden* series, which also presented modern culture to viewers through a domestic lens, was foregrounded by the identity of the visitor as a consumer. In addition, the viewer (who experienced a tragic war and looked forward to a return to normalcy), turned to housing as a problem to be solved by solutions found in modern architecture and design. MoMA ensured the success of an exhibition of modern, Bauhaus-associated architecture by addressing concerns of post-war housing, in addition to the spectacle of a suburban home in midtown Manhattan.

⁵³ Staniszewski. *The Power of Display*.

⁵⁴ Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 160.

Chapter VI: Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House* and the *Woman's Home Companion*

The year following the initial *House in the Garden*, MoMA and *Woman's Home Companion* magazine invited the architect Gregory Ain to create a house in the Sculpture Garden. As in the year preceding, Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House* (1950), is a fully finished and furnished home. Furnishings were selected by the Department of Architecture and Design. The Assistant Curator of Architecture and Design, Greta Daniel, assembled the furnishings. The exhibition, like Breuer's *House in the Garden*, responds to issues of suburban housing, like monotony in design (as seen in Levittown designs), presenting modern architecture as reasonable for suburban speculative design.⁵⁵

Figure 6.1: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain."* 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN447.5A



⁵⁵ "Exhibition House with Sliding Walls Opens May 19 in Museum Garden" *Press Release*, (The Museum of Modern Art, 1950).

Woman's Home Companion also responded to the post-war need for domestic architecture. Separate from their collaboration with MoMA, the journal offered advice on architectural plans for modern homes, published editorials about design objects, and included a variety of advertisements for all aspects of home design. For several years preceding and following this collaboration, the magazine featured many homes and interior spaces in its pages.⁵⁶ Other examples of home design in *Woman's Home Companion* included images of well-designed modern homes, often providing solutions to the use of space or incorporation of technology in suburban homes. In June 1950, the magazine included an eight-page portfolio, also featured on the front cover of the magazine, to accompany the *Exhibition House* at MoMA with color and black and white images and diagrams of the home. This portfolio was intended to reach the magazine's readers who did not have the opportunity to visit the museum in person as well as encourage those who could visit in person to go to MoMA. The magazine and the housing exhibition worked together to give their respective audiences an image of modern life intended to transport the viewer into modern spaces in which they might readily imagine themselves. This was achieved via drawings and images of the home within the pages of the journal, and within actual, built modern architecture in *Exhibition House*.

⁵⁶“Our House with a View to the Future: An Eight-Page Portfolio of Photographs,” *Woman's Home Companion*. (June 1950)

Figure 6.2: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain."* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN447.7.



The Ain house is a single-level home, featuring a modular, rectangular construction with a two-level flat roof. Mostly integrated into the space of the garden, the home featured a single-car garage, large glass walls, brick and wooden siding, and a large patio along the front of the home. The front entrance of the home was found in the secluded in-between space of the garage and living space. The inclusion of the garage marked this home as intended for suburbia, not for the location in which it was exhibited. It was covered by a white pergola-style cover, providing shade while allowing light to permeate the space. The rear entrance of the home was found not on the face of the transparent rear facade, but around the corner. The door on the side of the home kept the

vertical function of the door from impeding the grand façade of glass windows. A large overhang covers the rear of the home, providing shade for the patio, and presumably reducing the amount of sunlight entering the home. An early example of sustainability, a concern of Los Angeles-based architects, this would be beneficial for maintaining the temperature of the home in the summer months.⁵⁷ The windows open outwards, as opposed to lifting with springs, which would increase the appearance of bulk should the windows utilize springs or tracks to open. Some open in the style of casement windows which operate upon a vertical hinge, while others operate upon a hinged top, opening outwards in the fashion of awning windows.⁵⁸

Like the Marcel Breuer home, the Ain house is modernist in design and features an open concept with partial walls separating spaces. In installation photos, the living area features a large wall of windows, covered by heavy curtains. The furniture faces the window and fireplace. Behind the modular sofa is a partial wall with storage for books. This wall acts as a separation from the small dining space. Like the living area, one side of the dining area is flanked by a wall of windows, covered in curtains. The other side of the dining area is the opposite side of the partial wall that separates it from the living area. This side of the wall operates as both cabinet storage and bar area. A wall separates the dining space from the kitchen, yet there is no door to enclose this space. Unlike the Breuer house, this design offers less visibility into the rest of the home and does not implicate the expected female operator of the kitchen in a kind of ever-present watching over the home. This kitchen features modern amenities like a top-loading dishwasher,

⁵⁷ Anthony Denzer. *Gregory Ain: the Modern Home as Social Commentary*.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

washer, and dryer, subjectively desirable appliances in any era. The kitchen offers plenty of storage and workspace. The home also features a parents' bedroom, dressing area, children's bedroom, and playroom.

Figure 6.3: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain." 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN447.10*



What characterizes this home design as modern and utilitarian, is the option of sliding walls. Walls in the children's bedroom/playroom slide to open the spaces to each other. Walls in the living room and parents' bedroom can be opened to create a larger living space.⁵⁹ The Ain house, like Breuer's, offers the homeowner a space that is flexible in use and operation, referencing and offering a solution to the problem of small space.

⁵⁹ "Exhibition House with Sliding Walls Opens May 19 in Museum Garden" *Press Release*

Like other modern architecture, the house offers designated spaces for operation, which are conceived of broadly with the intention that the homeowner can make changes in the operation of the space. MoMA offered a physical presentation of the ideal use of the home. The Architecture and Design department at MoMA and the architect curated objects within the spaces and told the viewer how these well-educated individuals would envision the space.

Figure 6.4: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain."* 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN447.12



Ain focused on creating small, domestic architecture for the working class which adhered to the aesthetic values of modernism, especially those values which are associated with quality of life.⁶⁰ Ain's ambitious affordable housing cooperatives like the racially and culturally integrated *Community Homes Cooperative* (1946-1949), and associations with Communist organizations landed him on FBI watch lists.⁶¹ The design of Ain's *Exhibition House* is like the ones in the *Community Homes Cooperative*. This community included "day care facilities, parks, and health clinics."⁶² His post-war housing is regarded as valuable and worthy of preservation because of its contribution to simple, modern architecture in urban dwellings. MoMA, however, does not comment upon the intended sociological conceptualization of Ain's home.⁶³ The accompanying exhibition catalog refers briefly to his earlier work in low-cost community and apartment development, nevertheless ignoring how this house relates to racial integration, schools, community buildings, and shopping centers designed for *Community Homes Cooperative*.⁶⁴ The exhibition catalog regards this work noting:

More than most of his generation, Mr. Ain has concerned himself with the design of multiple dwellings and the layout of communities. He obtained a Guggenheim Fellowship for low-cost housing research in 1940, and his buildings have received numerous awards in nation-wide competitions.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Anthony Denzer. *Gregory Ain: the Modern Home as Social Commentary*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Phillip R. Denny. "The Architect, the Red Scare and the House That Disappeared." *The New York Times*. 2017.

⁶³ The notion of community planning and development is not novel to MoMA in Ain's architectural exhibition; it was also present in a section of the previously discussed MoMA exhibition *Wartime Housing* (1942).

"Wartime Housing," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1942).

⁶⁴ Gregory Ain. *The Museum of Modern Art: Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1950).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Community Homes Cooperative was intended to be a racially integrated post-war housing solution which was rejected by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) for mortgage insurance, which protects lenders against losses when owners default on mortgage loans.

By February of 1949, the story of *Community Homes*' plight made it all the way to the desk of President Truman. In a twenty-one-page letter to the president on the subject of FHA's racism, Thurgood Marshall, working for the NAACP, used the case of *Community Homes* to illustrate the bureaucracy's resistance to integration.⁶⁶

In this respect, the museum missed the opportunity to challenge the status quo of racially, culturally, and economically segregated communities in the United States. Ain's position in this cooperative housing solution is valuable in understanding that it was possible for MoMA to address issues beyond what modern design should look like as the architect selected for the job was deeply involved in working against racist government policies. From a contemporary point of view, in creating an exhibition intended to showcase affordably designed homes, it is easy to find fault with MoMA for ignoring economic, social, and political problems with which the architect was concerned.

⁶⁶ Anthony Denzer. *Gregory Ain: the Modern Home as Social Commentary*.

Chapter VII: The Magazine and the Home

Women's magazines and journals in the United States achieved mass circulation in the early 19th century, reaching readerships of more than 70,000 subscribers, and many more who would purchase individual issues at grocery stores or newsstands. Women's magazines were specifically oriented to a female readership and focused their content on domestic matters, often related to the appearance of the home. They offer products intended to ease domestic tasks or to improve the aesthetic appearance of the home. Women's magazines are often considered educators of female audiences in political issues, sometimes advocating for major political changes, like the right of women to vote.⁶⁷

We can look at the table of contents in the June 1950 issue of *Woman's Home Companion* (which features Ain's *Exhibition House*) as an example of the goals of women's magazines. Article titles offer advice on how to "Be Popular with Your Daughter", "It's a Sun-Wise Cut" and "The Companion Way to Be Neater and Sweeter." These examples emphasize the magazine's grounding in stereotypical "white, heterosexual, cis-gendered women's issues" outlined above. *Woman's Home Companion*, in articles coinciding with the June publication of Ain's *Exhibition House*, produced content that promoted the idea that it is the responsibility of women to make the home a comfortable and visually pleasing space. Four "homemaking" articles were published in

⁶⁷*The Lady Persuaders* by Helen Woodward offers a general history of women's magazines, and chapter 8, "Decline and Fall" offers a particularly thorough overview of the contents of women's magazines in the 20th century. Helen Woodward. *The Lady Persuaders*. (Oboloensky, 1960).

this issue of the magazine. One featured article is titled “Your Shopping Companion.” The single-page article lists items that may be of value or interest to the reader. The magazine has compiled a list that suggests that the wise shopper would consider their “companion” before making purchases. Of interest in this thesis is the magazine’s desire to promote well-designed objects, and the motivation to teach women to carefully select items for their homes. Other homemaking articles, relevant to the concerns of this thesis include “Custom-Made by You”, “Prefab Furniture”, and of course the MoMA feature article “Our House with a View - to the Future.”

Art historian Kristina Wilson discusses mid-century modernism and gender, taking home economics books as her example, saying “in general all five of these books presume that household maintenance work such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, and hospitality are the responsibility of the woman of the house.”⁶⁸ Wilson’s study considers race, gender, politics, and power in design, and the first two chapters analyze literature and magazines. The author’s analysis of the representation of mid-century modernism is valuable in considering the images and ideas in the pages of *Woman’s Home Companion*. Wilson writes that gender informs the modernist landscape of literature, apparent in both books and magazines. Gendered stereotypes of household responsibilities in the texts examined are enforced by presumptive language used by the authors, which implicates the female body in household work. Wilson examines and analyzes advertisements in magazines, concluding that mid-century publications enforced gendered stereotypes. *Woman’s Home Companion*, like the publications Wilson analyzes,

⁶⁸ Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender and the Politics of Power in Design*. (Princeton University Press, 2021).

upheld those same typified gender roles in editorial articles and commercial advertisements. The selection and purchase of objects for the home is imperative in the operation of a home. The task of purchasing home goods is largely associated with women, especially in post-industrial societies in which the purchase of mass-produced objects prevails over making things by hand or having objects custom made. The purchaser is given the agency to choose from a variety of objects, and the magazine operates as an educator of what products are good, and which are not. The reader of women's magazines is encouraged to participate in a consumer society as a careful selector of objects, much like a curator, although for the home instead of the museum. Editorials and advertisements (sometimes disguised in earlier magazines as editorials) associate the labor of homemaking with the role of the curator: using a discerning eye in purchasing objects for the home.

Women's magazines and home design have a long, intertwined history. Before MoMA's series of *Houses in the Garden*, other exhibitions of houses existed, as well as designs in magazines for homes. These magazines contained examples of good and bad design, offering readers design ideas from which they might model their own homes. This included the use of spaces as well as style preferences, marking certain features as desirable and classy, and others as tacky and unstylish. In addition to the consideration of how the space worked and appeared, the magazine considered the physical structure of the home. Edward Bok, longtime author and editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, a publication similar to *Woman's Home Companion*, is cited in this history of making home plans widely available through magazines.⁶⁹ Bok was the editor from 1889 to 1919,

⁶⁹ Helen Woodward. *The Lady Persuaders*.

publishing information about domestic architecture and design. The mass-circulation of magazines made these images widely available to the American public. Readers were able to take these designs and have homes built after them.⁷⁰ This came about because Bok disliked the state of American homes which the editor understood to be designed mostly by people not formally trained as architects. Bok desired to provide good design to the American public, creating a more beautiful and better designed America, and he believed this was most possible when homes are designed by architects. Women's magazines continued to include architectural designs in their pages, beginning in the early 20th century and even after the decline of one of the most well-read women's magazines of the early 20th century, *Woman's Home Companion*.⁷¹ It must be noted that Bok was an anti-feminist who did not believe women should be able to vote, work outside of the home, or be educated.⁷² The history of making home design accessible is rooted in an anti-feminist ideology, one which places the woman in the home and expects their attention to be devoted only to endeavors of the home.

The cover of *Woman's Home Companion* invites readers to "step inside" Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House* through the pages of the magazine, much like the visitor in the museum garden. Within the magazine, the reader is met with short fictional stories, health articles, beauty, and parenting advice, as well as numerous advertisements promoting the benefits of the products listed for the home or the female consumer. *Woman's Home Companion's* articles illustrate an example of what women's magazine's function and

⁷⁰ Kathryn Dethier, "The Spirit of Progressive Reform: The 'Ladies' Home Journal' House Plans, 1900-1902" *Journal of Design History* Vol. 6 No. 4. 1993.

⁷¹ Woodward, Helen. *The Lady Persuaders*.

⁷² Susan E. Marshall. *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage*. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

goals were: to entertain and to share information about topics related to the home and a feminine experience. In this, it might be understood that the magazine promoted domestic topics to a female readership. The magazine, and the museum, invited women to participate in the consumption of modern architecture and interior design, either through purchases or experiences.

Figure 7.1: Interior installation view, Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House*. June 1950. *Woman's Home Companion*, Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, New York.



The *Woman's Home Companion's* role in Gregory Ain's *Exhibition House* seems to largely rest upon its ability to advertise the exhibition to a large audience. An accompanying catalog and photo spread were released in the same month's issue as the opening of the exhibition. This would have been beneficial in helping the exhibition

reach a broader audience. Captions to the images describe the home, and the specific features seen, as well as why the home is constructed in this way. The initial page describes the façade saying that it is “varied by the use of setbacks and a two-level roof to avoid monotony.”⁷³ According to the article, Ain valued avoiding monotony in design in the development of suburban communities, especially those with small lots. The house’s crowning achievement is in flexible spaces wherein the walls of the home could be opened and closed to expand common areas to typically more private areas.⁷⁴ Ain’s house concept was intended to bring a functional design to small, affordable homes. Walls in the living room, dining room, parents’ bedroom, and kitchen could be opened to create one large living space. The children’s bedroom and playroom might also be opened to form one large space. The concept of flexible open space is intended to alleviate the occupant’s feeling of enclosure in small spaces, while also allowing for privacy when needed. A notable difference in the stressed value of the home is the magazine’s insistence that those planning homes must consider the allotment of space for future appliances.

In MoMA press releases and the *Woman’s Home Companion’s House in the Museum Garden* article, appliances and amenities were stressed as noteworthy and desirable products for the home, which in a “not-too-distant tomorrow,” may become necessities. The mass production of appliances lowered the cost of expensive items like washing machines or refrigerators. The notion that large appliances should be available to the broader public suggests equity in consumerism - the idea that almost anyone could

⁷³ “Our House with a View - to the Future.” *Woman’s Home Companion*. (June 1950). pg. 65

⁷⁴ “Exhibition House with Sliding Walls Opens May 19 in Museum Garden.” *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1950)

MoMA promoted this kind of home design and architecture as viable and affordable for middle-class families. The kitchen was furnished with all-electric appliances by General Electric Co., including a range, dishwasher, disposal, tucked-away iron, washing machine, dryer, and refrigerator. These amenities were intended to ease the life of the homeowner. Unlike MoMA's exhibition catalog, the *Woman's Home Companion* does not mention the specific brands of appliances within the home - but the magazine features a variety of brands of appliances and furnishings within the pages of their advertisements.

Woman's Home Companion's advertisements suggest that mass-produced appliances benefit the American consumer. For example, page 58 of the magazine features a full-page advertisement for the Frigidaire Automatic Washer. The advertisement is partially disguised as an editorial. Published in black and white, the page includes short paragraphs of text, written in a similar format to the rest of the magazine, proclaiming the benefits of automatic washing machines, notably that this kind of appliance eases the tasks of homemaking - so that other tasks or leisure might be enjoyed while the machine completes the work. The interest and focus on the function of the home and its luxurious and comfortable possibilities are extolled as virtuous and desirable for a suburban homeowner. The magazine, summarizing the design of the kitchen and inclusion of appliances, says that "It's shown here as you'd like it to be, as we believe it to be - either today or in a not-too-distant tomorrow."⁷⁷ *Woman's Home Companion* seems to extoll the Ain house as the cutting edge of modern domestic architecture and a valuable investment for the home buyer's future.

⁷⁷ "Our House with a View - to the Future." *Woman's Home Companion*. (June 1950). p. 71.

In considering consumerism in the Houses in the Garden and the *Woman's Home Companion*, we might consider an example of an author interested in promoting domestic consumption to the American public. Prominent home economics authors like Christine Frederick (1883-1970), who wrote in women's magazines like *Ladies Home Journal*, applied consumerism to home economics through magazine articles and books. Frederick promoted the economic value of the female consumer, traditional gendered household roles, and the benefits of efficiency and standardized practices in the home. These works offered directions on how to utilize the home to its best advantage, and to maximize time management.⁷⁸ The scientific management theories of Fred W. Taylor, Taylorism, inform Frederick's approach to home economics. This theory broke down the mechanics of production, timed them, and eliminated unnecessary movement or steps. Taylorism continued to inform women's magazines and their approach to home efficiency. The *Woman's Home Companion* seems to value making the home more efficient and easier to maintain as opposed to a deeply personal and intimate construction.

Unlike previous architecture exhibitions, the mid-century homemaker is the target audience for the House in the Garden exhibitions. The female homemaker is targeted as a viewer and consumer of both objects and experiences in ways pioneered at MoMA in the *Useful Objects* exhibitions and fully realized in the *House in the Museum Garden* exhibitions. In the *Houses in the Garden*, the architects created homes that promote standardized uses - in the kitchen, dining, living spaces, bedrooms, and bathrooms. While there is some level of customization to be had in the way of furniture, paint colors, and

⁷⁸ Janice Williams Rutherford. *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency*. (University of Georgia Press, 2003).

other easily interchangeable features, the structure of the exhibition with a fully furnished interior and exhibition checklist (Breuer's exhibition even directed viewers/consumers to New Design, Inc. where they might purchase items) created a kind of shopping list to be crossed off. Interior spaces are assigned to homemakers to quasi-curate, much as Breuer curated objects within the exhibition, or the articles and advertisements of the *Woman's Home Companion* selected and promoted objects and advice for the wise shopper.

MoMA's collaboration with *Woman's Home Companion* and the promotion of the amenities of the kitchen targets a female audience in the procurement of modern homes and furnishings. This is to say that both the museum and magazine understand that the engagement of women with the exhibition is valuable in advocating for modern home design. A large portion of the magazine focused on advertisements and editorials for the homemaker, stating which products were good and which were not, and advice on how to maintain a home. The magazine, in the three years prior to AIA's *Exhibition House*, published a series on small homes for the American people.⁷⁹ These homes were moderate in scale and intended to bring modernity to suburbia. Because the circulation of the magazine reached so many homes, we can see both the magazine and MoMA as active participants in proposing (and promoting) products and solutions for the post-war housing boom, including women as important participants in the solution.

⁷⁹ "Our House with a View - to the Future." *Woman's Home Companion*. (June 1950).

Chapter VIII: MoMA and *Woman's Home Companion's* Promotion of the Houses

Though both MoMA and the *Woman's Home Companion* were invested in modern housing, they were also somewhat at odds in their promotion of the home. The magazine's function was to provide entertainment and information for its readership (assumed to be largely women). *Woman's Home Companion's* goal was to promote modern architecture and domestic objects to an audience of women readers, and the advertisers' goal was to sell objects. The magazine's reader was used as an intermediary to promote modern architecture to the public. The magazine was limited to promoting the home as being the space of femininity and familial life, whereas MoMA's participation extended to an audience that included a wider range of people than the expected reader of women's magazines. The museum's press releases invited families and those interested in suburban housing solutions, as opposed to the magazine's approach which advertised the home to women (their primary readers) for their families. This distinction is valuable because it helps define the mutually beneficial relationship between MoMA and *Woman's Home Companion*. MoMA reached the readers of *Woman's Home Companion*, and the magazine was associated with MoMA, an institution with an elite reputation in modern fine art. In fact, MoMA was continuously concerned with its perceived elitism, so partnering with a magazine with a mass readership helped to extend MoMA's design principles to the masses. This exchange of value brings MoMA's message farther - ideally to locations that might have found traveling to the exhibition impractical. This would have reached the California audience that would be interested in the west coast architect's *Exhibition House*.

Chapter IX: A Viewer in New York City

What does it mean to be walking in the city and to pass by a suburban-style home on 54th Street? The person walking through midtown Manhattan is someone surrounded by crowded buildings, major commercial avenues, and narrow streets, with a multitude of cars and people in the area. In 1940 the population of New York City was 7,454,995, with a Manhattan borough population of 1,889,924 in 1940.⁸⁰ Roughly 4 million more people lived in New York City than in the nation's second-most populous city, Chicago.⁸¹ The viewer's presence in the most populous city in the United States would certainly inform the way they interact with the space and people around them.

In this busy, evolving area, the visitor would have been poised in an in-between position. The garden itself was a stretch of green space in the middle of Manhattan - a kind of anomaly in a busy city. This kind of contradiction must certainly have attracted visitors with the house's low height, located in the meditative, quiet space of the garden. It is easy to imagine the surprise one would feel upon finding a low, single-family detached home in Manhattan. We then understand how the viewer might idealize the suburban lifestyle, seemingly slow-paced and spacious in comparison with the surroundings of the exhibition. The exhibition and the home itself become of interest two-fold: viewing the exhibition in the garden, and the completion of a person's very own home in the suburbs.

⁸⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City." 1940, Table 1, Table 6.

⁸¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, Chicago." 1940, Table 2.

Figure 9.1: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain"*
Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
IN447.5.



There are many histories of anti-urbanism, often associated with the migration to suburbia from cities, which characterize the urban citizen as at odds with the supposed “unnatural” condition of the city. Sociologist Jeffrey K. Hadden and historian Josef J. Barton explore the history of “anti-urbanism” through studies of Plato’s writings and extending to modern writers who speak of the American wilderness’ beauty, as in Henry Thoreau’s *Walden* or Thomas Cole’s landscapes. The argument features the predicament of the human condition as uncomfortable with untamed wilderness, and similar

discomfort with the structure of urban environments.⁸² This then culminates in a metaphor, the American wilderness as a garden, found in many instances in 19th-century American literature.⁸³ The garden has been utilized as a metaphor for the Americas in many instances, including via European colonizers of the 16th century. The garden becomes a symbol of both wilderness and man's domination and ability to cultivate nature.

The *Houses* were placed in the Museum Garden, marked by the tranquil environment of cultivated outdoor space. Established as a potential solution to the problem of housing, and placed in the context of the garden, the *Houses* bridge city and nature, defining a model for the American citizen to commit to patriotism via notions of pastoralism in the development of suburban homes. The natural world is decidedly an element of United States culture, the simplicity of agrarian life is valued as morally noble. Pastoralism and agrarianism were endorsed by early American post-revolutionary political figures like Thomas Jefferson in his text *Notes on Virginia*.⁸⁴ The complexities of industrialism and housing are marked by the association of the machine as antithetical to nature.⁸⁵ Breuer and Ayn's Houses are representative of the post-industrial return to nature from the city for the supposed benefits of the suburban environment for children, quality of life, and moral values. In a March 1949 article in *The New Yorker*, before the

⁸² Jeffrey K. Hadden and Josef J. Barton, "Thoughts on the History of Anti-Urban Ideology," *New Towns and the Suburban Dream*. (Kennikat Press, 1977). p. 33.

⁸³ Leo Marx, *The Machine in The Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. (Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁸⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Yale University Press, 2022).

⁸⁵ William Peterson, "The Ideological Origins of Britain's New Towns," *New Towns and the Suburban Dream*. (Kennikat Press, 1977). p. 75

opening of the exhibition, the uncredited author quotes Breuer in a comment about American culture:

It is all the more agreeable to design in this country because building is the American gift, the American passion. Everybody in America is interested in building his own house. Everybody knows what a two-by-four is and what to do with it. Everybody is still half a pioneer at heart, ready to go into the wilderness and make himself a shelter there.⁸⁶

Breuer makes a point about American building which seems to address a cultural trend that embraces building whole-heartedly. The architect seems to understand the desire of American homeowners to build outside of the city, in the “wilderness” and enjoy a sense of freedom. In this way, the Houses in the Garden appeal to the desire to escape the city and enjoy greener pastures and remote living. The seeming contradiction of modern architecture and nature is remedied by the architect’s use of natural materials in the home’s finishes, and large walls of plate-glass windows, appealing to an American audience interested in bringing nature indoors.

The way one experiences being in the Houses in the Garden is informed by their presence as a museum visitor in the space. The visitor is generally aware of an experience expected of some museums: ascension and rising above the experience of the everyday. There is a different experience at MoMA - while still aspirational, MoMA’s exhibitions share with the viewer how they can integrate modernism into their own lives. In 1949, MoMA opened a 20th-anniversary exhibition, *Modern Art in Your Life*, which promoted the idea that modern art and design are part of everyday life. This exhibition was organized by Rene d’Harnoncourt, listed in press releases as the “Director of the Museum’s Curatorial Departments,” with art historian and then editor of the *Magazine of*

⁸⁶ “American Gift” *The New Yorker*. 1949. pp. 26-27

Art, Robert Goldwater. Taking up the entire third floor of MoMA were works of “applied arts” and “pure art” including advertisements, architecture, industrial and furniture design, painting, and sculpture. This exhibition paired the applied arts and fine arts to educate visitors about how modern art and design are already part of their lives and to make this more apparent. “The Museum feels that this educational exhibition associating pure and applied art - without minimizing the independent existence of either - may help to make modern art more comprehensible to more people.”⁸⁷

Figure 9.2: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Modern Art in Your Life."* Photograph by Soichi Sunami. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN423.4.



⁸⁷ “Museum to Celebrate its 20th Anniversary with Large Exhibition, ‘Modern Art in Your Life,’ Opening in October.” *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

Modern Art in Your Life and the Houses in the Garden are aspirational: showing visitors how modern art is part of their lives, and in the *House in the Garden*, suggesting how they might further incorporate it into their lives. Viewers are shown possibilities to transform their home experience - either in the kinds of homes they purchase and build, or in the furniture and design objects they choose to fill their spaces. The museum's exhibition becomes a kind of shopping experience.

Chapter X: MoMA, Design, and Shopping

MoMA's modern design exhibitions before, during, and after the *Houses in the Garden* are worth drawing a comparison to consider differences in exhibition purpose. These exhibitions are similar in conception, promoting modern objects, design, and architecture, however, the way the viewer participates in these exhibitions is different. We might consider the *Useful Objects* series, which coincided with the month of December (and the holiday shopping season), as a predecessor which informed the exhibition design of the *Houses in the Garden*. With an initial exhibition, *Useful Household Objects Under \$5.00* in 1938, this exhibition displayed objects considered useful, as well as modern in design, in the museum.⁸⁸ For nine years, this series continued and was a well-received exhibition.⁸⁹ *Useful Objects* exhibited objects initially under five dollars, ending in 1947 with a maximum price of one hundred dollars. MoMA's galleries displayed objects under a certain price, paralleling a bargain shopping experience.⁹⁰

Bowls, hangers, dishracks, flatware, and other household objects were displayed on shelves. The viewer was then able to circulate the space, consider the price of the object, and its use, and decide whether to purchase the object. While unable to directly purchase the object within the museum, the viewer might then find information on where

⁸⁸ After the initial exhibition, the series underwent various name changes, like *Useful Objects of American Design Under \$10.00* in the 1939-1940, and *Useful Objects in Wartime Under \$10.00* in 1942, *100 Useful Objects of Fine Design (available under \$100)* in 1947, *Christmas Exhibition: Useful Objects Under \$10.00* in 1948, *Design Show: Christmas 1949* - dropping "Useful Objects" entirely.

⁸⁹ Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*.

⁹⁰ The notion of a true "bargain" is questionable - adjusted for inflation in 2022, five dollars is about \$65.98, and one hundred dollars is equal to \$1,319.61. The term "bargain" is used in regard to the idea that everything in the exhibition was under a certain price, mimicking the experience of bargain shopping. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "CPI Inflation Calculator."

the object was sold, and subsequently purchase it elsewhere. This kind of exhibition experience focuses on the viewer's participation in capitalist consumption, offering objects to view which are affordable, and of modern design. This series' shopping sensibility is repeated in later exhibitions, to different effects.

Figure 10.1: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Useful Household Objects Under \$5.00."* Photograph by Soichi Sunami. 1938. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN80.9.

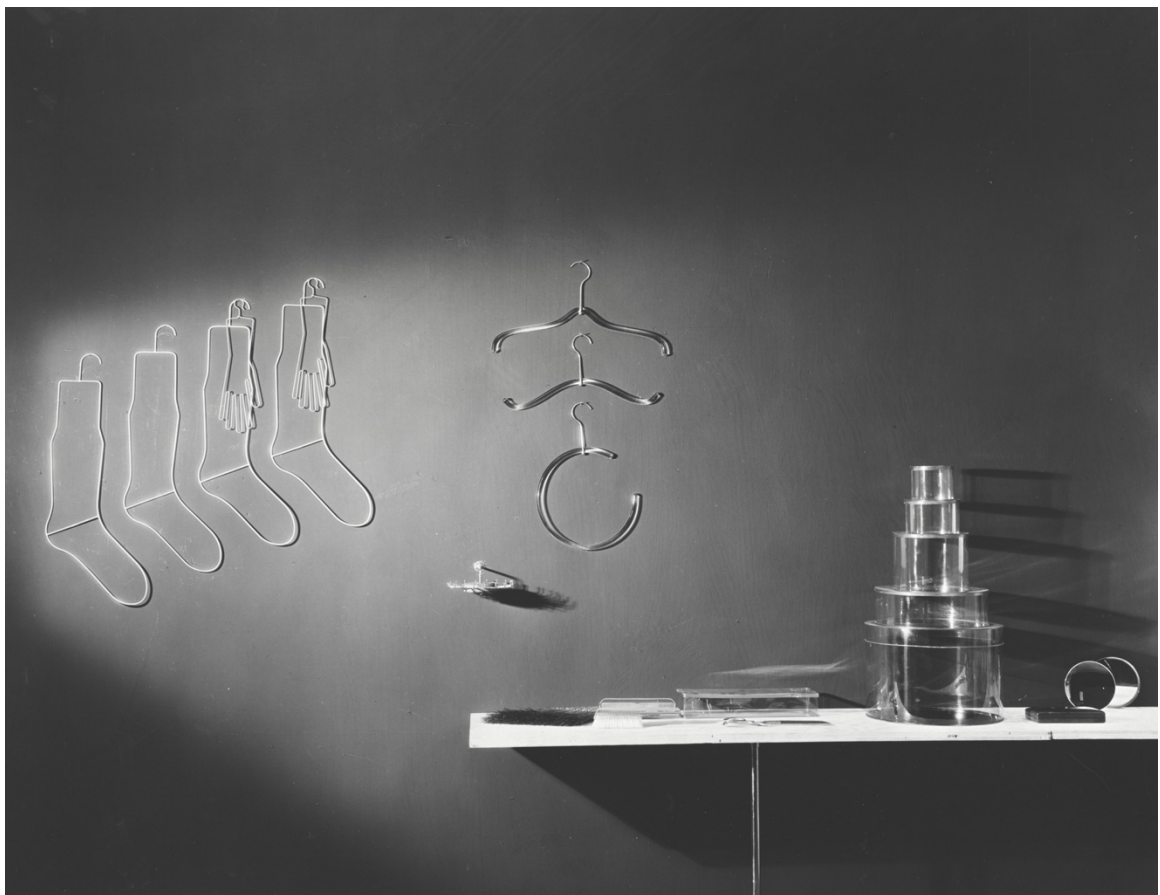


Figure 10.2: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Useful Household Objects Under \$5.00."* Photograph by Soichi Sunami. 1938. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN80.3.



We may then ask what experience occurs in the *Houses in the Garden*, and how might this be different from the experience expected inside the museum. What does the visitor gain from an experience in a model home? The viewer might expect, as in an exhibition in the museum, to better understand the modern objects exhibited, and how they might be collected and used in the home. They might expect, as the press release states, to have a better understanding of the value of modern architectural design for suburban living. In attending an exhibition outside the normal expectations of an architectural exhibition at MoMA, the visitor might expect to find notions of architecture

challenged. This is especially marked by the *House's* suburban style - which is in opposition to the experience of the visitor in midtown Manhattan. Or they may find that they have learned new ideas about decorating their own spaces in the modern style. The creation of houses in a museum context allows the viewer to be fully enveloped in what a modern home should look like. This exhibition model is important in establishing expectations for viewers of this modern home - it tells them what good modern design looks like, and how it might be used in the home. The model home is adjacent to the shopping experience. It presents a pre-designed space accompanied by exhibition materials that detail the cost of the home and its objects, manufacturers, and retailers. Because the objects are selected with attainability in mind, this creates an aspirational shopping experience.

Figure 10.3: *From left to right: "Charles Eames, Ray Eames, Dorothy Shaver, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr," at the exhibition, "Good Design." Photograph by Leo Trachtenberg. 1950–1951. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN463.9.*



Following the success of the *Useful Objects* series, and contemporaneous with the second *House in the Garden*, MoMA's *Good Design* exhibitions (1950-1955) followed a similar shopping sensibility. Where *Useful Objects*' exhibition layout adhered to a system of organization on tables and shelves, *Good Design*'s exhibition layout began laying out spaces according to the function of the object and its potential placement in a home or living space, creating a more immersive experience. This more immersive experience follows the success of the *Houses*, embodying a similar logic that relates the viewer's life experience as a consumer and potential homeowner outside of the museum context to the experience of the museum's galleries. In creating an immersive shopping experience, MoMA's exhibition further relates to the viewer's capitalist/consumerist experience outside of the museum.

Figure 10.4: *Installation view of the exhibition, "Good Design."* Photograph by Soichi Sunami. 1950–1951. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN463.1.



Furthermore, *Good Design*, in contrast to *Useful Objects*, emphasized the viewer's experience as a savvy consumer, producing a "Good Design" label that retailers were able to place on objects chosen for the exhibition, allowing consumers to identify MoMA-endorsed items. This approach marks the museum's capability to determine what is good design - beyond the realm of the museum walls and into actual retail space. MoMA partnered with the Chicago Merchandise Mart, a wholesale establishment that sold household wares to create a semi-annual program of exhibitions at the Merchandise Mart, culminating in a year-end exhibition in the museum's galleries. The art historians Terence Riley and Edward Eigen argue in "Between the Museum and Marketplace: Selling Good Design" that the Merchandise Mart and MoMA combined their audiences; MoMA's members and visitors, likely pre-disposed to modern design, and the Merchandise Mart's wholesale buyers who defined what goods were available in retail.⁹¹ There is no ambiguity here in the museum's desire to influence buyers' taste in commercial goods. This program worked adjacently with the shopping experience, participating directly through the Merchandise Mart and in marketing goods with the museum's branding.

These two series are equivalent to the shopping experience, utilizing the language of department stores in the use of shelves with simple placement and organization, and the creation of constructed spaces or vignettes to invoke the idea of shopping. The interest MoMA cultivated in modern objects relates the exhibition language of the Houses in the Garden with the *Good Design* series. These exhibitions all utilize

⁹¹ Terence Riley and Edward Eigen, "Between the Museum and Marketplace: Selling Good Design," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*. (MIT Press, 1998)

household objects in the exhibition space to create an understanding that the viewer is intended to internalize ideas about what good, tasteful modern design looks like.

The houses are informed by this; the house exhibitions utilize this same approach of well-designed objects, which are then placed in the actual space of the home. This expands beyond the shopping experience into a simulated living experience - the viewer, enveloped in a modern home, is unable to fully realize the experience of the modern home because they cannot live in the space. Like the previous design exhibitions, the museum provided brochures that stated where the objects might be purchased and their cost. This exhibition expands the notion of the shopping experience beyond singular objects to a collection of objects which could be selected to furnish an entire home—essentially a lifestyle. These exhibitions of modern design present a view of modernity, in stark contrast with the modernity of war. They show the viewer what is good and beneficial about modern life, highlighting its uses in a consumer's life. Telling consumers how they can bring the clean and fantastic modernist lifestyle into their own homes is not unique to MoMA: other institutions invoked this idea to promote modern life as an antidote to the problems of the world, albeit for different purposes. The next chapter highlights how other exhibitions and corporations use modern design as anti-communist Cold War propaganda.

Chapter XI: Cold War Exhibitions and MoMA

Following the exhibition of full-scale, post-war model homes at MoMA, we might make a connection with later histories of American post-war domestic life with other international exhibitions. This is valuable in understanding the cultural implications of MoMA's consumer-oriented exhibitions which occurred following World War II. These exhibitions also utilize a consumer-focused language to achieve their goals. While MoMA worked to share modern design and architecture with the suburban dweller, other post-war exhibitions suggest exhibitions of modern design and architecture can be used to express anti-Communist ideals. An explicit example is the 1959 *American National Exhibition* which put American domestic spaces, kitchens, and consumer objects on display in Moscow in the U.S.S.R., an act of Cold War propaganda.⁹² This Cold War propaganda extolled the virtues of American domestic life, characterized by the wonders and leisure of suburban American architecture - with amenities like dishwashers and washing machines, ample space, garages, etc. The exhibition involved the creation of an American kitchen, which posited that the American people had innovative appliances which brought domestic life a sense of leisure and ease. While similar in conception, this exhibition, unlike the *Houses in the Garden*, did not display the actual artifact of an architectural space. However, the use of domestic spaces to express anti-Communist ideas is valuable to further understand how the exhibition format of the Houses in the Garden can be understood in alternative contexts.

⁹² Ellen Mickiewicz. "Efficacy and Evidence: Evaluating U.S. Goals at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 4 (2011)

Figure 11.1: *Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon.* Elliott Erwitt. 1959. Moscow, USSR.



The exhibition was visited by the millions in Russia and was the location of one of the most iconic incidents of the Cold War, referred to as the “Kitchen Debates.”⁹³ The “Kitchen Debates” were famous for the televised arguments between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon. In the debate, they argued about the virtues of housing in Russia and the United States when viewing the model kitchen. Nixon characterized the appliance-filled kitchen as easing the labor of housework for the American woman. Khrushchev responded by saying that these appliances were lazy and intended to keep the female citizen in the kitchen instead of the workforce, like Russian women. Khrushchev criticizes the quality and time the American house was intended to last, which Nixon said would last for 20 years. Khrushchev argued that this was to support builders to make money, not to keep the American people housed

⁹³ Nixon, Richard. *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, Documents.* (Princeton University Press, 2008)

for generations. These points about American housing drive home the idea that the modernization of the American home was not entirely intended to bring about radical social change in terms of personal freedom but to bring ease and comfort through consumerist propaganda. MoMA's exhibitions of post-war housing seem to counter this idea - and suggest that forward progress and modern design is intended to last, especially in the selection of objects of "good design" in the *Good Design* exhibitions. To this point, an exploration of the value of modern appliances would have situated the exhibition closer to previous architecture exhibitions at MoMA, which emphasized what the value of modernism is to viewers. The House in the Garden exhibitions avoid the idea of radical social change via the modernization and automation of the home.

The *American National Exhibition*'s kitchen was fully outfitted by General Electric (G.E.), which also furnished appliances in both Houses in the Garden. It must be noted that after World War II, G.E. managed the Hanford site, originally built to research nuclear fission for the Manhattan Project, later producing plutonium for the creation of nuclear weapons in the Cold War. This project and site were largely responsible for the creation of the atomic bomb.⁹⁴ Because G.E. managed the site following the war, the company had a vested economic interest in the Cold War and the production of nuclear weapons at the time of both the *House in the Garden*, and ten years later in the *American National Exhibition*.

Like so many other wartime production sites, the Hanford site contributed to the need for housing during and after the war. The Hanford Engineering Works (HEW)

⁹⁴ Department of Energy, and Francis G. Gosling, *The Manhattan Project: Making the Atomic Bomb* (1999).

Village is a notable example of wartime housing, essentially a federally owned company town.⁹⁵ Architect Gustav Albin Pehrson designed houses and communities under the contract of E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company (who managed the site before G.E.). Pehrson planned the community with a series of alphabet-named house plans, and like the Houses in the Garden, these could be altered by the homeowner. Like in the exhibit *Wartime Housing*, priority was given to the planning of the Hanford site's residential accommodations; it considered access to public facilities, outdoor recreational spaces, and placement of housing for optimal heating, cooling, and shade.⁹⁶ G.E.'s participation in post-war housing exhibitions is indicative of its capacity to manufacture and market specialized appliances on a large scale. Participation in highly visited exhibitions that promoted the leisure and necessity of such appliances provides evidence that G.E. had a vested interest in establishing their company as the expected company to produce appliances for post-war housing.

Through the display of G.E. appliances in the *Houses in the Garden*, the museum, and the *American National Exhibition*, created expectations for domestic consumers about household objects. G.E appliances were shown as aspirational for visitors to each exhibition. This is to say that MoMA, as an elite institution engaged with well-designed products (as in the *Good Design* exhibitions) chose a particular brand of appliance, which lends credit to the object for its design. This brand can be said to be aspirational for consumers as it is endorsed by MoMA and the *American National Exhibition*.

⁹⁵ David W. Harvey & Katheryn Hill Krafft, "The Hanford Engineer Works Village: Shaping a Nuclear Community," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History*, Spring 2004: Vol. 18, No. 1

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter XII: Conclusion

MoMA, as an institution devoted to the study of modern art, utilized architecture exhibitions to participate in the social and political issues of the time. The housing crisis and changing ideas about how a home should operate and what it should look like allowed MoMA to promote modern architecture and design integrated into a compelling vision of the American suburban lifestyle. The House in the Garden exhibitions and the *American National Exhibition* shared the idea of the promotion of productivity and consumption, marked by the desire for consumption. This consumption is marked by leisure, achieved through objects that reduce the strain of domestic duties. It is in the issue of MoMA's gendered expectations of homemakers that we might find a paradox to be further explored. Modern design is held up as emblematic of democratic freedom, yet it is used to perpetuate gendered roles in the domestic sphere. The idea of freedom in MoMA's architecture and design exhibitions, and the *American National Exhibition*, is not freedom for all. Additionally, the Houses in the Garden ignored the issue of racially segregated communities, an issue present in other housing solutions of the era, or services that would benefit a suburban community including schools, traffic control, and public outdoor spaces - ideas promoted both by MoMA's exhibitions and the architect Gregory Ain. MoMA used companies like General Electric (directly involved in the politics of the Cold War) for appliances, created lists of products available for purchase at nearby retailers, and produced a home intended to idealize and promote a specific image of American life; that is, one of both leisure and production. The lack of criticality in promotional materials and press releases on the part of the museum and affiliated groups

like New Design, Inc.⁹⁷ and *Woman's Home Companion*, as well as exhibition reviews, points to a shift in exhibition design that avoids socio-political issues. It is impossible for an institution that creates exhibitions intended to solve the problems of the people to remain impartial to the issues that those people face. MoMA's architectural exhibition history prior to the *House in the Garden* considered the sociological needs of the people those spaces were designed for, including community-based solutions and information which helped visitors access those resources.

Figure 12.1: *Installation view of the exhibition "The House in the Museum Garden."* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1949. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN405.12.



⁹⁷ MoMA additionally collaborated with New Design Inc. on the exhibition *Penthouse Furniture Exhibition* October 4–10, 1948. Items were loaned from New Design Inc. and shown in the Members' Penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art.

"Penthouse Furniture Exhibition." *Press Release*. (The Museum of Modern Art, 1948).

Figure 12.2: *Installation view of the exhibition "Exhibition House by Gregory Ain."* Photograph by Ezra Stoller. 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN447.6.



A comparison can be made between MoMA's wartime and post-war architecture exhibitions to understand the growing adherence to an a-political methodology. The final pages of the exhibition catalog for *Wartime Housing* and the final pages of the exhibition catalog for Gregory Ain's *Woman's Home Companion Exhibition House* are examples of this shift in MoMA's architectural exhibition model. *Wartime Housing's* final pages produce a flow chart of organizations and how visitors should proceed in securing adequate housing and community resources through collective organization and government resources. The final pages of the Breuer and Ain catalogs, in contrast, detail the contributor's locations where the items in the home might be purchased. The earlier is

concerned with how one might improve their lives and contribute to the war effort through community organization and action. The latter provides the suburban, post-war consumer an idea of how to construct their own modern lifestyle. It is in this distinction we see a shift in purpose: earlier work focused on the social needs of the homeowner, whereas later work focused on the promotion of modernity for the sake of creating an idealized version of the American lifestyle, adhering to a larger narrative of post-war and Cold War propaganda.

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