

AMERICA THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW:
MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH KITCHEN
ADVERTISEMENTS, PRODUCTS AND DESIGN

by

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ABSTRACT
AMERICA THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW: MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY
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During the nineteen-fifties in America the kitchen space and its related objects came to be emblematic of the concerns and ideals of American culture at the time. A study of the advertisements and articles in the periodicals of the era reveals a culture focused on leisure, technology, family life and personal plenty. Through a combined analysis of the images and texts found in surviving vintage magazines of the decade and more recent scholarship on the popular culture of the era it can be seen that the American dream of a happier, easier, more free and more luxurious life was made manifest within the kitchen space. Beyond gaining greater knowledge of the period, a larger goal of this thesis is to encourage greater support and respect for material culture as both a topic and a tool of study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 1: The Kitchen Opens Up..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: To Live and Buy The Good Life..... | 25 |
| Chapter 3: Art and the Nineteen-Fifties Kitchen: Celebrating Freedom with the Kitchen Wallpaper | 43 |
| Chapter 4: Being a Housewife in the Nineteen-Fifties..... | 63 |
| Chapter 5: The Kitchen and the Cold War..... | 88 |
| Conclusion..... | 98 |
| Bibliography..... | 102 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Image 1: Veteran’s Trailer Camp at the University of Iowa, 1947 | 17 |
| Image 2: Interior of Trailer living at University of Iowa, 1947 | 17 |
| Image 3: Levittown Home in Process with Appliances and Fixtures..... | 18 |
| Image 4: Levitt and Sons 1952 Flyer for the Rancher Model..... | 19 |
| Image 5: American Kitchens Advertisement from <i>American Home</i> , March 1951..... | 20 |
| Image 6: Kitchen from the Levittowner Model, c. 1950..... | 21 |
| Image 7: Replica of the Bauhaus Kitchen from 1923..... | 22 |
| Image 8: Margarete Schütte-Lihoyzky’s Frankfurt Kitchen..... | 23 |
| Image 9: American Standard Advertisement, <i>American Home</i> , April 1956..... | 24 |
| Image 10: Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement, <i>American Home</i> , April 1956..... | 37 |
| Image 11: Floor Plan of Re-Modeled Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1953..... | 38 |
| Image 12: Floor Plan of Re-Modeled Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1953..... | 38 |
| Image 13: Floor Plan of Re-Modeled Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1953..... | 38 |
| Image 14: Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , March 1953..... | 39 |
| Image 15: General Electric Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , April 1958..... | 40 |
| Image 16: Frigidaire Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1953..... | 41 |
| Image 17: General Electric Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1956..... | 42 |
| Image 18: “The Editor’s Forecast of the New Taste Cycle”, <i>House Beautiful</i> , October 1952..... | 52 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Image 19: Jackson Pollock, <i>Blue Poles 11</i> , 1952..... | 53 |
| Image 20: Willem De Kooning, <i>Abstraction</i> , 1949-1950..... | 53 |
| Image 21: Finn Juhl, <i>The 108 Dining Chair</i> , 1946..... | 53 |
| Image 22: Armstrong Flooring Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , December 1953..... | 54 |
| Image 23: George Nelson, <i>Ball Clock</i> , 1947..... | 55 |
| Image 24: Clyfford Still, <i>1957-D No.1</i> , 1957..... | 55 |
| Image 25: Armstrong <i>Spatter</i> Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , April 1950..... | 56 |
| Image 26: Reader's Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1956..... | 57 |
| Image 27: Charles and Ray Eames, <i>Molded Plywood Dining Chair</i> , 1946..... | 58 |
| Image 28: Isamu Noguchi, <i>Coffee Table</i> , 1948..... | 58 |
| Image 29: Barnett Newman, <i>Concord</i> , 1949..... | 58 |
| Image 30: Reader's Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , March 1956..... | 59 |
| Image 31: Ellsworth Kelly, <i>Black Ripe</i> , 1955..... | 60 |
| Image 32: Charles and Ray Eames, <i>Molded Plastic Side Chair with Wire Base</i> , 1950..... | 60 |
| Image 33: Early American Inspired Kitchen, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , January 1955..... | 61 |
| Image 34: Early American Inspired Kitchen, <i>American Home</i> , April 1956..... | 61 |
| Image 35: Kitchen with Abstract Mural, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , November 1956..... | 62 |
| Image 36: International Harvester Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , April 1950..... | 78 |
| Image 37: Hotpoint Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , July 1951..... | 79 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Image 38: American Kitchens Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , July 1951..... | 80 |
| Image 39: Norge Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , April 1950..... | 81 |
| Image 40: Frigidaire Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , January 1957..... | 82 |
| Image 41: Frigidaire Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , January 1957..... | 83 |
| Image 42: Josef Albers, <i>Homage to the Square: Blue, White, Gray</i> , 1951..... | 84 |
| Image 43: Josef Albers, <i>Homage to the Square: Night Shades</i> , 1957..... | 84 |
| Image 44: Tappan Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , March 1953..... | 85 |
| Image 45: Tappan Advertisement, <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> , April 1958..... | 86 |
| Image 46: Illustration from <i>Electrical Merchandising</i> , 1957..... | 87 |
| Image 47: The General Foods-Bird's Eye Demonstration Kitchen..... | 99 |
| Image 48: The RCA-Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen..... | 99 |
| Image 49: The Model Apartment Kitchen..... | 100 |
| Image 50: Exterior View of the Splitnik..... | 100 |
| Image 51: The General Electric Kitchen in the Splitnik..... | 101 |
| Image 52: A Soviet Visitor Tests the Oven in the Splitnik..... | 101 |
| Image 53: Khrushchev and Nixon in the Splitnik's Kitchen..... | 101 |

Introduction

The following thesis is concerned with the ability of everyday objects and spaces to record moments in time. Both are informed by, and impact, the period that they come from. To illustrate this concept focus has been placed on mid-twentieth century America. During the nineteen-fifties, consumer goods came to the forefront of people's lives and took on greater cultural significance than they had in previous decades. The years following the war were a boom period for most middle-class Americans. While they made up 35% of the population they earned 42% of the national income¹. Their spending habits dominated the decade, with the amount that they spent increasing 60% from what it had been pre-war². Spending was the way of the era and a large part of earned income was able to go to the purchasing of non-essential consumer goods³.

And there was a sudden wealth of consumer goods to be purchased. Materials and production facilities had been freed from their wartime occupations⁴. Technological advancements developed during the war in automation and assembly meant goods could finally be produced in greater number, do more advanced things and were more affordable than before. The goods bought became symbols of the American good life⁵. The items consumers purchased were emblematic of their owner's participation in a life of affluence, freedom and ease.

¹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 148.

² Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1988), 16.

³ Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, 147

⁴ Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007) 3.

⁵ Hine, *Populuxe*, 4.

While the production and consumption of goods increased across virtually all realms of consumables, the focus of the vast majority of the spending during the nineteen-fifties was on the home and items related to it. In the years following the war, the amount of income spent on items for the home rose 240%⁶. The home became an almost patriotic site of spending. The purchasing of items for it was seen as a commitment by the homeowner to the family unit and American values⁷. Buying items for the home enhanced the family's quality of life, was seen as the exercising of personal choice and was an important way to help one fit into one's community.

Within this general focus on the home, the kitchen became a special area of concern. The kitchen was a touchstone of America during the nineteen-fifties. A formerly closed off and utilitarian space, it was opened to the rest of the house at the beginning of the decade and its design and inhabitants (both human and mechanical) became imbued with meaning for the popular culture of the era⁸. Both the kitchen space itself and the objects within it can now be read as symbols of the decade.

⁶ Comparatively, spending on food increased only 33% .(Tyler May, 148.)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nancy Carlisle and Melinda Talbot Nasardinov. *America's Kitchens*. (Boston: Historic New England, 2008),156.

Method

Studying an actual space and items that have now been mostly lost or replaced presents some challenges. To overcome them, I have chosen to analyze the articles and advertisements related to kitchens that can be found in the popular magazines of the decade. I have acquired thirty vintage magazines from across the nineteen-fifties. As the kitchen area is my main concern I have focused my attention on magazines concerned with the home. Making up the bulk of my primary source material are issues of *Better Homes and Gardens*, *American Home*, *House Beautiful*, *Look*, *Living* and *McCall's*. Issues of *Life* magazine were consulted as well, for although *Life* did not focus on the home, it did concern itself with the everyday life and experiences of America.

While magazines present a wide range of images and texts to use as primary sources they do have limitations for researchers. When looking at a magazine one has to continually take into account issues such as editorial bias, advertiser manipulation and intended audience. In trying to view the life and concerns of the average, everyday American through the pages of a magazine, it is important to not base any conclusions on single instances of an image or statement. What I have been very careful to do in my analysis is to hone in on the prevalent *trends* in items, information, opinions and advertising that appear *across* the different publications and *throughout* the decade.

While the thirty issues of mid-century American magazines that have been considered could not possibly capture the exact life experiences and opinions of every single American during the nineteen-fifties they do, just as magazines do

today, capture the zeitgeist of the time. They can act as a revelation of the concerns and ideals of the majority.

The magazines consulted were all widely circulated among the general public and represent a good picture of the kitchen ideals of the era. They have an advantage over other sources of kitchen imagery from the decade. While personal photographs still exist of nineteen-fifties homes their accurate dating can rarely be assured. Though homes that were built in the nineteen-fifties still stand, the kitchen spaces have often been updated with new appliances and other changes to the space. The advertisements and articles found in the magazines are all securely dated and allow the chronological changes that occurred in the kitchen space to be revealed. As fortune would have it an event occurred at the end of the decade that serves as historical support of the American cultural concerns and ideals I have found presented in the period's home magazines. The American National Exhibition in Moscow that occurred during the summer of 1959 utilized presentations of the American home and particularly the American kitchen as a tool to acquaint Soviet visitors with the American way of life and extoll its virtues of personal freedom and material affluence.

Structurally, this thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter recounts how the kitchen space came to be opened up to the rest of the home as a result of the housing shortage following the end of WWII. Chapter two considers how the design of the kitchen and the appliances created for it met the desire of nineteen-fifties Americans to actively and conspicuously live the good life. Chapter three explores the relationship between modern art and the kitchen and how the

design of appliances and the decoration of the kitchen related to expressing a sense of freedom in living. Chapter four looks at the role of the American housewife and how the image of her changed in advertisements of the decade from a hardworking member of the household to an ornamental accessory of the home. Finally, chapter five concerns itself with the use of kitchens in the American National Exhibition in Moscow and how Vice-President Nixon utilized the kitchen as an example of the ideals of American society.

Chapter 1: The Kitchen Opens Up

“Our nation’s housing shortage poses an acute and bitter problem for returning servicemen, unable to find shelter for their families. There is no speedy solution. Authorities place the nation’s need at 10,000,000 new homes; yet few anticipate more than 750,000 will be built annually within the next several years. That means temporary shelter for many, in garages, converted office buildings, trailer houses, even barns.”

“What if you must live in a garage?” *Better Homes and Gardens*, March, 1946⁹

Post WWII Housing Shortages:

During the nineteen-fifties the physical location of the kitchen within the home changed. What had traditionally been a shut off and predominantly utilitarian space was opened up to the rest of the home¹⁰. As a result it became a showplace of the homeowner’s engagement with the modern good life. This change occurred due to new building practices and home design that sought to expedite the creation of homes to fill the extreme housing shortage that developed following WWII¹¹.

Returning servicemen and their new families were often unable to find housing. Many had to share quarters with friends and relations or seek homes in non-traditional structures, such as converted garages, grain bins and even trolley cars ¹².

In April of 1947 *Life* magazine ran a feature on “Veterans at College”¹³. The article focused on the veterans attending school at the University of Iowa, whose experiences mirrored that of those attending universities across the country.

Housing for veterans and their families was at such low availability that the

⁹ Ethel Morrison Marsden, “What if you must live in a Garage?”, *Better Homes and Gardens*, March 1946, 38.

¹⁰ Carlisle and Talbot Nasardinov. 156.

¹¹ Dianne Harris, “The House I Live In: Architecture, Modernism and Identity in Levittown” in *Second Suburb*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 202.

¹² Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232.

¹³ *Life*, “Veterans at College”, April 21, 1947, 105.

university had taken to creating housing in both trailer camps and Quonset huts (see images 1 and 2). The conditions in the trailer camps were cramped, but for “about \$25 a month they get a furnished trailer, electric light and the right to use the communal baths and washrooms. Most of them are on the waiting list for a barracks or a Quonset hut, where they will have the luxury of running water”¹⁴.

To end the housing crisis the federal government responded by underwriting mortgages for veterans. This provided a measure of financial security that encouraged the large-scale building of new homes by a variety of private builders¹⁵. Builders focused on creating swaths of new homes in planned communities on undeveloped land they were able to acquire fairly economically. Perhaps the most famous of these new suburban communities were the eponymous ones created by Levitt and Sons, Levittown¹⁶. Levitt and Sons actually built three communities called Levittown from the late nineteen-forties to the early nineteen-sixties, the first on Long Island in New York, the second in Pennsylvania and the third in New Jersey¹⁷.

While the company had began by making more luxurious homes in the pre-war years, the goal that it had for their post-war homes was to create the best single-family homes available on the market for the lowest cost¹⁸. This matched what most prospective homebuyers were looking for. With homes in short supply new homebuyers were not overly picky, but they did want the best home, for the least

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 233.

¹⁶ Dianne Harris, “A Second Suburb”, in *Second Suburb*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁷ Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967),4.

¹⁸ Jackson, 235.

money and available as soon as possible¹⁹. To meet this demand Levitt and Son's used the latest tools available and streamlined the building process of their homes to lower costs and build the maximum number of units in the least amount of time. Almost Ford-like in their efficiency, the construction of a Levittown home was divided into twenty-seven steps by work teams. Each team performed a specific activity at each building site, using preassembled parts and recently developed power tools, such as electric saws and nail guns²⁰. With this method thirty houses could be built in a day. Using this process Levittown homes were very affordable, with models running from \$9,000 to \$17,900 and requiring no down payment for veterans, with others only having to place \$100 down²¹. The refusal of the company to commit to using union labor also aided in keeping costs low for the homebuyers and speeding up building schedules²².

Levitt and Sons are often credited with pioneering the systematic division-of-labor process. But, in reality, they were only very skilled at the assembly line technique that other builders had previously developed and were also using²³. Levittown homes were similar in size and cost to the homes that other builders were creating to fill the housing shortage. Levitt and Sons focused their marketing efforts not just on selling their homes affordability, but on the key points of difference that they had decided all their homes would contain.

¹⁹ Gans, *The Levittowners* 32.

²⁰ Jackson, 235.

²¹ Richard Wagner and Amy Duckett Wagner, *Images of America: Levittown*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 3.

²² Jackson, 237.

²³ Richard Longstreth, "The Levitts, Mass-Produced Houses, and Community Planning in the Mid-twentieth Century" in *Second Suburb*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 125.

The features Levitt and Sons offered would not have been found in older housing in the cities or in the temporary housing that people lived in following the war. The large picture window included in each home, that looked out over a family lawn, were both luxurious aspects unfamiliar to most. New homebuyers were so unfamiliar with lawns that they had to be taught how to properly tend them in the information packets they were provided with when they moved in²⁴. The open floor plan that fit best with the speedy and low cost building, as it required minimal building of walls, was promoted as a feature. Spaces and rooms all flowed into one another with a limited number of walls. The open plan concept of the nineteen-fifties was different from the open plan concept of today. Currently, we consider the open plan to have virtually no walls at all. For the nineteen-fifties, open plan meant that the public rooms of the home (kitchen, dining room and living room) were all fairly interconnected with half walls or walls with cut outs (such as over kitchen counters or through centrally located hearths) that would create a sense of separate areas in a open space. This helped to define the different areas of the home and yet also provided an openness that was billed as encouraging family togetherness and unity. While this was a clever marketing ploy to cover up the quick building process, rather than a response to an actual need, it did provide a positive change for homebuyers. For those who had been used to cramped one-room living it offered a sense of privacy and for those who had lived in homes with separate rooms, it gave a sense of modern living.

²⁴ Wagner and Duckett Wagner, *Images of America: Levittown*, 39.

A result of the open plan was that the kitchen was now exposed and integrated with the rest of the house. Levitt and Sons utilized this necessary development as yet a further sales opportunity. The kitchen was designed to be a step-saving wonder, had ample storage and counter space and included kitchen appliances²⁵. The fully loaded kitchen became the main point of difference to encourage home sales and a home's kitchen features were always the first to be listed on the flyers for the different models of homes (see images 3 and 4). Levittown kitchens were sold as promises of a better and more modern life in one's new home in postwar America.

The Room that Sells the House: The Mid-Century Re-Birth of the Kitchen

The kitchen, as most of us know it today, is a direct legacy of the nineteen-fifties kitchen. Situating it so it is open to the rest of the home, carefully styling and decorating it, adding in dining space, using it as a site of entertaining, including built-in features and up-to-date appliances are all common aspects of contemporary kitchens that became established in the nineteen-fifties. Kitchens had typically been considered utilitarian spaces for most of American history. The site of heat, noise and food smells, they were purposefully set off from the rest of the home by all those that were able to do so. Kitchen spaces in the years leading up to the war were still very primitive by today's standards. In 1940 only a little over half of families in America had refrigerators and washing machines and a third of homes still used

²⁵Curtis Miner, "Pink Kitchens for Little Boxes: The Evolution of 1950s Kitchen Design in Levittown", in *Second Suburb*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 250.

wood or coal for cooking²⁶. Once the war began (and in the years immediately following its end), even those families who could access or afford appliances were not able to acquire them due to the rationing of materials and the industry's concentration on wartime production.

Rather than a back room affair with no appliances, piecemeal kitchen storage and mixed height work surfaces Levittown kitchens were orientated to the front of the home, included the latest models of refrigerator, stove and dishwasher and seventy-five feet of built-in storage and single height counter space²⁷. The American Kitchens ad from *American Home's* March 1951 issue offers a glimpse of pre-war kitchens (see image 5). In an attempt to sell readers on remodeling their kitchens the ad shows a housewife distressed at the idea of visitors seeing her outdated kitchen. Storage is limited to the hutch (on which the cabinet drawer and doors refuse to close), the sink's legs and pipes are exposed to the room and a table designed for sitting has to double as a backbreaking work surface. The 'after' kitchen in the ad is in line with what Levitt and Sons created for the kitchen in their pre-fab homes (see image 6). Acres of built-in storage space, dedicated work surfaces at uniform height, unsightly pipes hidden away within cabinetry plus the latest appliances (which were ultimately available in a range of colors) all roll out to meet the dining table²⁸.

²⁶ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983),196.

²⁷ Miner, "Pink Kitchens for Little Boxes", 252.

²⁸ Folding screens that ran on tracks in the floor and ceiling were placed in the kitchen area in the early years of Levittown homes, so homeowners close off the space if needed. As the decade progressed, this feature was eliminated. (Wagner and Duckett Wagner, 43)

Stylistically, both the kitchen in the advertisement and the Levittown kitchen are reminiscent of appliance design of the nineteen-thirties. Rounded corners on both sinks and appliances create soft, sculptural masses. Keeping their proportions short, squat and heavy emphasizes the weight and bulk of refrigerators. When first popularized in the nineteen-thirties these heavy and bulbous forms acted as manifestations of the need to have some sort of stability during an unstable decade. With the stock market crash of 1929 and the following Great Depression compounded with the difficulties of the Dust Bowl, the nineteen-thirties were a difficult period for most Americans in one way or another. For those who were able to create new kitchen spaces and buy new appliances, manufacturers and designers offered them soothing, smoothly rounded corners and large masses that acted as reassuring anchors of constancy²⁹. Why the design forms of the nineteen-thirties carried over into the nineteen-fifties has less to do with these connotations of strength and more to do with the gap in manufacturing and design that occurred because of WWII. With war manufacturing taking over materials and assembly plants, new kitchen and appliance designs did not really develop during the war years, so, following the end of the war manufacturers and designers picked up where they left had off, with the designs of the nineteen-thirties.³⁰ As the nineteen-fifties progressed a more dynamic and bold style of sharper corners and less bulky shapes developed, as will be seen later.

²⁹ During the nineteen-thirties there was a push to add beautification to the kitchen, through paint colors and curtain patterns. But, by and large, the kitchen space was still separated from the rest of the home and was only appropriate for informal meals, like breakfast. To entertain, or dine, in the kitchen was considered a lower class activity. (Carlisle and Talbot Nasardinov. 123)

³⁰ The tastes that define a decade take time to develop and manifest. While the United States did not enter WWII until the end of 1941, no real new design trends had yet developed for the American kitchen at that point.

Much like their systematized home building process, Levitt and Sons are often given credit for creating the efficient unified kitchen. In actuality, the design of their kitchens was an extension of previous events and innovations in the kitchen space during the early twentieth-century. America saw a drop in the number of domestic servants looking for work in early 1900s, as more women were drawn to factory, retail and clerical work that did not create as much of a burden on their time. With housewives now having to do work on their own, there developed an increased concern with creating efficient kitchen workspaces, with the contents placed in such a manner to eliminate unnecessary steps. *As House Beautiful* put it in 1915, a woman required “ a small spotless space, conveniently planned, with the tools of her occupation all in easy reach...a place planned merely for one kind of work, which she leaves when that kind of work is done.”³¹.

This desire for an efficient kitchen space for a housewife to work in on her own made its first major appearance in Germany. In 1923 the Bauhaus, during its early years in Weimar, executed an exhibition of its work. Part of this exhibition was the creation of a home that was fully designed and furnished by the staff and students at the school. The kitchen space in the Bauhaus home was small in scale and placed directly next to the dining room (see image 7)³². It was “intended solely for cooking purposes” and “featured a continuous worktop under the window, chairs which could be fitted under the table to save space and surfaces which were smooth and easy to clean.”. The ideal Bauhaus kitchen presented an almost clinical aesthetic. Efficiency and hygiene were the paramount concerns in the choices of the

³¹ Carlisle and Talbot Nasardinov, 124.

³² Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933*, (Cologne: Taschen, 1990), 105.

L-shaped layout of the kitchen and the materials used. Though the use of ecru and slate gray in the cabinets and counters provide a slight counter to the laboratory-like feel, the overall scheme of the kitchen is one of sharp corners and linearity. The round, brushed steel cabinet and drawer pulls provide a slight sense of softness, but this softness is largely over-shadowed by contrasting edging on the cabinets and drawers, which serve to emphasize the repetition of strong right angles. The Bauhaus kitchen contained no extra spaces for entertaining or additional aspects of style or flair to make it a welcoming environment. It was a space designed to facilitate the production of food in the most efficient ways possible.

The small and efficient kitchen that the Bauhaus created entered into the public realm in 1926 with architect Margarete Schütte-Lihoyzky kitchen design for social housing apartments in Frankfurt, Germany (see image 8)³³. Following WWI Germany experienced a severe housing shortage similar to the one America would go through post-WWII. Rather than focus on the creation of single-family homes the German government embarked on a socialist program to create large-scale apartment complexes for families. Schütte-Lihoyzky designed a kitchen space that would take up a minimal amount of the already limited apartment space. The kitchen she designed has a rather galley-like quality to it, with all storage and appliances placed in a U formation and stacked on top of each other, minimizing the kitchen's footprint and the number of steps the housewife had to take to complete tasks. The Frankfurt kitchen was based on a series of work-stations placed close

³³ Karen Melching "Frankfurt Kitchen: Patina Follows Function", *www.vam.ac.uk*
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-53/frankfurt-kitchen-patina-follows-function/>.

together so that the processes of making food and clean up could all be efficiently carried out in the small space. Health and hygiene were addressed with the kitchen stool being of an adjustable height, the floors and walls tiled for easy cleaning, the labeled storage drawers being crafted out of scratch-proof aluminum and even the blue coloring of the cabinets and counters being chosen as a result of contemporary studies' finding that the color blue repelled flies³⁴. The Frankfurt kitchen was an even greater presentation of the desire for efficiency and hygiene than the Bauhaus kitchen³⁵. The Bauhaus kitchen did, ultimately, become physically present in America. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius built a galley-shaped, sharp cornered, efficient kitchen of stainless steel and white enamel in his family's Massachusetts home in 1937, when he joined the faculty at Harvard's Graduate School of Design³⁶. The efficiency of Levittown kitchens was not an original development of Levitt and Sons, it was an extension of trends already present in international design development from earlier decades. However, the opening of the space to the rest of the home to reveal the kitchen's built-in components, matching colors and push-button conveniences as marks of living a modern and upwardly mobile life, was an original idea created to appeal to American consumers³⁷.

³⁴ Martina Hebler, "The Frankfurt Kitchen: The Model of Modernity and the "Madness" of Traditional Users, 1926-1933," in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 171.

³⁵ While the Bauhaus had embraced cleanliness and hygiene and turned it into a crisp and clinical aesthetic, Schütte-Lihoyzky rejected concerns with aesthetics outright and created the space around wholly practical concerns. (Ibid.)

³⁶ Carlisle and Talbot Nasardinov, 42.

³⁷ Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 263.

Levitt and Sons focused much of their research and development on the kitchen because they realized, as most builders of the era did, that the kitchen was the “room that sells the house”, not just because of its open plan layout, top of the line appliances, built-in storage/workspace but because the combination of *all three*³⁸. This trifecta promised the homeowners a slice of the American good life that few young men and women had had a chance to experience in their pre-marriage years³⁹.

The augmenting and styling of the kitchen, with the latest up-to-date tools and in the manner one wished, became of paramount importance, as it had never been⁴⁰. A 1956 American Standard ad that appeared in the April edition of *American Home* illustrates the change of the kitchen with the bold tag line “Your kitchen can be as lovely as a living room” (see image 9)⁴¹. No longer in its hidden pre-war position, the kitchen was now front and center in the home and privy to as much decoration and scrutiny as the living room was⁴².

³⁸ Miner, 245.

³⁹Ibid. 244.

⁴⁰ Hine, 60.

⁴¹ American Standard Advertisement, April 1956, *American Home*, 18.

⁴² Even in 1956 the vestiges of the kitchen design elements of the nineteen-thirties were still present. The rounded corners of the counter tops persist in the American Standard kitchen ad. However, the corners of the cabinets now come to sharp angles. The oven is now built-in to the wall and occurs in stainless steel, rather than the white enamel of the nineteen-thirties and early nineteen-fifties. By incorporating a large area of shiny steel into their 1956 advertisement American Standard was attempting to infuse the kitchen with a sense of space age modernity.



Image 1: View of the veteran housing trailer camps at the University of Iowa in 1947. Source: *Life*, "Veterans at College", April 21, 1947, 109.



Image 2: Interior view of typical trailer living for families of veteran's enrolled at the University of Iowa in 1947. Source: *Life*, "Veterans at College", April 21, 1947, 107.

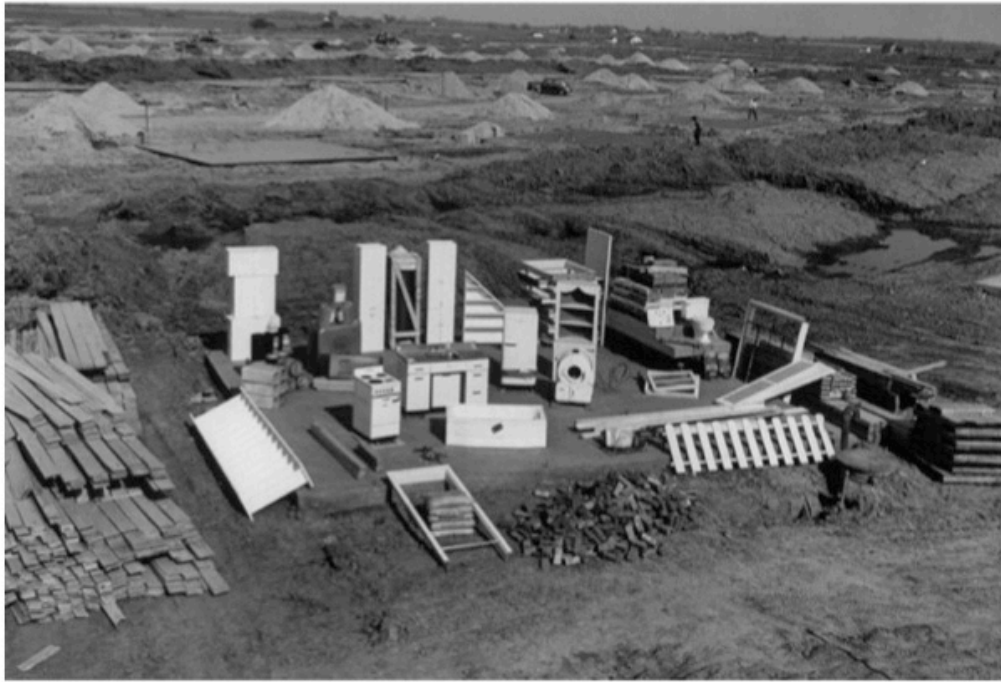


Image 3: Levittown home in the process of being built, with appliances and fixtures to be included in the kitchen. Source: 1940s.org, : http://1940s.org/history/post-wwii-optimism-and-the-rise-of-the-late-1940s-american-suburb/attachment/building_materials_levittown/

The Rancher

PRICE - \$8,990 • \$57 A MONTH!

A NEW HOUSE has just been built in Levittown, Pa., the most perfectly planned community in America. It may be seen 7 days a week from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. at the Exhibit Center right on the Bristol Pike at the entrance to Levittown.

There is nothing to compare with it anywhere. Corners are \$500 additional and are on plots at least 80 x 100. Inside plots are at least 60 x 100.

Each house has an entrance foyer, a very large living room, two beautiful bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a porch or carport on the main floor. There is a stairway to a large open attic which can be finished into two more bedrooms and another bath.

This price is subject to increase at any time. Those who make application now will be protected against any rise in price.

The Following is Included in Every House:

- Bendix Dialomatic Washer
- General Electric Push-button Range
- Tracy All-Steel Cabinets
- Tracy Stainless Steel Sink
- General Bronze Sliding Aluminum Windows
- Thermopane Insulated Glass
- Briggs Colored Bath Fixtures
- Veos Porcelain-on-Steel Wall Tile
- Hot Water Radiant Heating
- Municipal Sewers and Water
- Aero Electric Ventilating Fan
- Federal Circuit Breakers - No Fuses
- York-Shipley Automatic Oil Burner
- 100% Complete Insulation
- Matico Tile Floors
- Complete Landscaping
- Outside Garden Storage Closet
- Levittown Community Swimming Pools
- Levittown Community Playgrounds

Total Settlement Charges \$10

APPLICATIONS:

Applications must be made in person at the Exhibit Center in Levittown, and must be accompanied by a good-faith deposit of \$100.

FOR VETERANS: NO DOWN PAYMENT IS REQUIRED

Carrying charges are \$57 a month and that includes taxes, fire insurance, interest and complete repayment of the mortgage.

FOR NON-VETERANS:

Total cash required (including the \$100 mentioned above) is \$450. Carrying charges are \$57 a month and that includes taxes, fire insurance, interest, and complete repayment of the mortgage.

SETTLEMENT CHARGES:

All settlement charges are included in the one fee of \$10. This includes all legal fees, all transfer taxes, all recording charges—everything!

LEVITTOWN MAY BE REACHED AS FOLLOWS:

By car from Philadelphia: Drive out Roosevelt Boulevard continuing on Route 1 for about 5 miles. Turn right at Levittown sign to Route 13. Turn left on Route 13 about 3 miles to the Exhibit Center.

By bus from Philadelphia: Take Levittown Express Bus at Bridge Street station of Elevated direct to Exhibit Center.

By car from Trenton: Cross the bridge into Pennsylvania, turn left to Route 13, (Bristol Pike). Continue on Route 13 four miles past Morrisville.

By car from Camden: Drive out Route 130 (Burlington Pike) to Burlington. Turn left and cross bridge to Bristol. Turn right on Route 13 four miles to Exhibit Center.

Levitt and Sons
INCORPORATED

BRISTOL PIKE • LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA
Telephone WINDSOR 6-1100

Image 4: Back Page of Levitt and Sons 1952 flyer advertising their Rancher model. Source: Richard Wagner and Amy Duckett Wagner, *Images of America: Levittown* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 45.

FOLKS ALWAYS END UP IN THE KITCHEN!

ONLY 1/2
the Cost of Refurnishing
Your Living Room . . .

To Transform That Old, Ugly Work-Trap Kitchen Into a Modern, Step-Saving American Kitchen!

ONLY A FEW DOLLARS A MONTH ON EASY FHA TERMS

NOW—you can have a real American Kitchen! Ask your dealer today about those easy terms! Just compare how little it costs to modernize your most-used room—the kitchen—in comparison to any other room in the house! Banish youth-robbing kitchen drudgery—never again face the embarrassment of trying to hide your ugly old-fashioned kitchen. See for yourself the work-saving features that cut your kitchen work in half!

- The most beautifully designed kitchen in America—efficient, step-saving.
- Lifetime vinyl work surfaces in 5 attractive colors.
- Store-house storage space at fingertip level.
- Easiest to clean—rounded drawer interiors wipe out like a bowl—no handles to collect dirt.

Ask Western Union—Operator 25—for the name of your nearest American Kitchens dealer.

AMERICAN CENTRAL DIVISION  CONSERVILLE, INDIANA

American KITCHENS
"SAVE 1000 STEPS A DAY"

American Central Division, Dept. AH-4, Arco Mfg. Corp., Conersville, Indiana.
Here's 25¢—please rush my complete planning kit, including new Model Kitchen Designer (with movable units) and new full-color catalog.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ County _____ State _____

THE AMERICAN HOME, MARCH, 1951

Image 5: American Kitchens Advertisement. Source: *American Home March*, 1951, 79.



Image 6: Kitchen of the Levittowner model, circa 1950. Source: Richard Wagner and Amy Duckett Wagner, *Images of America: Levittown* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010),42.



Image 7: Replica of the Bauhaus kitchen created for the exhibition of 1923. Source : http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/ConstrBau/Bauhaus1_gallery.htm



Image 8: Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt Kitchen, 1926. Source: Martina Hebler, "The Frankfurt Kitchen: The Model of Modernity and the "Madness" of Traditional Users, 1926-1933" in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 170.



**Your kitchen
can be as lovely
as a living room**

You'll find work more pleasant,
entertaining more fun in this cheerful
kitchen planned and decorated by
American-Standard and Imperial

American-Standard kitchens are living-room-lovely with their clean, contemporary lines. And you can harmonize or contrast the colors of counter tops . . . roomy sinks . . . handle color-guards. For work-saving convenience, all cabinets open at a finger touch. Their sliding drawers and shelves are interchangeable, so you can arrange storage space to fit your needs. For long service and lasting beauty, cabinets are made of sturdy steel with a mar-resistant baked-enamel finish. See the newest, loveliest kitchens at your American-Standard retailer's. He's listed in your phone book's Yellow Pages under "kitchens." American-Standard Plumbing and Heating Division, Pittsburgh 30, Pa.

The most beautiful kitchens are

AMERICAN-STANDARD KITCHENS



Glendura Soil-Proof Wallcoverings are actually scrubable . . . dirt and grime are almost instantly removed with soap and water. Even the more stubborn stains like grease, fruit or ketchup can be quickly removed with ordinary household cleansing agents as well as bleaches. Yes, you can count on Glendura keeping its clean, original locked-in beauty*! See the more than 160 smart, new patterns now on display at your Imperial dealer. Let Glendura help you make your kitchen a charming, work-saving second living room. Pattern illustrated is California Kitchen #20302..

Glendura[®]
SOIL-PROOF WALLCOVERING
by **IMPERIAL**

*3-year free-replacement guarantee when cleaning instructions are followed.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR KITCHEN DECORATING INFORMATION



Image 9: American Standard Advertisement. Source *American Home* April, 1956, 18.

Chapter 2: To Live and Buy the Good Life

“We had as a nation emerged from a great war, itself following a long and protracted Depression. We thought, all of us, men and women alike, to replenish ourselves in goods and spirit...”⁴³

Viewing the home, the kitchen and appliances as tangible manifestations of the American good life did not remain exclusive to the suburbs. As people moved in droves into the new subdivisions, the homes there came to be seen as the fashionable way to live⁴⁴. What suburban homes had were considered to be the newest and the best⁴⁵. Manufacturers and advertisers for kitchen items agreed with, and helped spread, this way of thinking across the nation. They began to sell their kitchen items and designs as the path to a more modern, and therefore better, way of living. This love of the new coupled with effective and pervasive advertisements spread the suburban notion of the kitchen as the mark of the homeowner’s participation in the American good life into the popular consciousness of the rest of the nation⁴⁶.

As the Youngstown Kitchens ad in *American Home’s* April 1956 edition stated, adding a Youngstown Kitchen was perfect “for that NEW home look” (see image 10)⁴⁷. If the consumers took the advice of the ad and decided to “visit the model homes in your community” they would find Youngstown Kitchens in “more fine homes that ever before!”. The ample storage space, work centers and yards of counter spaces that offer “so much convenience, such beautiful colors” bear a direct

⁴³ Tyler May, 49.

⁴⁴ Hine, 23.

⁴⁵ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 73.

⁴⁶ Hine, 64.

⁴⁷ Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement, April 1956, *American Home*, 101.

similarity to the homes found in Levittown. In *Better Homes and Gardens* November 1953 feature on “New Kitchens from Old” the floor plans for all three homes clearly show incorporations of aspects found in Levittown kitchens (see images 11-13)⁴⁸. Cabinets are placed by formerly freestanding ranges and refrigerators to provide storage and work space. Dining areas are added into the kitchen space itself by converting pantries and removing walls that separated former dining rooms from the kitchen⁴⁹. Large windows are also added in two of the three kitchens, just as would have been found in Levittown. Built-in cabinets and counters became the new norm and anyone who was American, and valued the family, tried to open the kitchen up to the dining area or, at least, include a table and chairs in their new kitchen plans to try and mimic the open plan living of the suburbs⁵⁰.

The new open plan did have its downfalls. *American Home's* April 1956 issue featured an article asking “What’s Wrong with Walls?”⁵¹. It highlighted the difficulties associated with open plan living such as loss of privacy, difficulty in keeping spaces tidy when they served multiple purposes and increased noise. All these reasonable points no doubt troubled a fair number of Americans in their new homes, but the style nonetheless persisted throughout the decade. In true American spirit it even became a forum for innovation and the creation of yet more things to buy. Armstrong ads for noise reducing false ceiling panels are peppered throughout the magazines of the era.

⁴⁸ *Better Homes and Gardens*, “New Kitchens from Old”, November 1953, 65.

⁴⁹ When possible, kitchens were created to conform to either a U or L shaped plan, to minimize the number of steps the housewife had to take throughout her day. (Carlisle and Talbot Nasardinov. *America's Kitchens*, 158.)

⁵⁰ Tyler May, 152.

⁵¹ Evelyn Bowen, “What is Wrong with Walls?” *American Home*, April 1956, 68.

Out of all of the appliances produced in the industrial world in the nineteen-fifties Americans were responsible for buying three quarters of them. Appliances did more than cook food and keep it cold. They represented “something fundamental to the postwar understanding of national identity: a sense of freedom, of effortless ease, of technological mastery, modernity, and access to conveniences formally reserved for the very rich”⁵². The layered meanings that the kitchen space, and its mechanical inhabitants, took on for Americans can be seen in the decade’s advertisements.

The association of technology with the creation of ease is apparent in Coolerator’s ad for its Leadership Line that appeared in the March 1953 issues of *Better Homes and Gardens*⁵³. Billed as “Big News for ’53 Kitchens!” housewives on the fence about if they wanted to invest in the line could send away for a booklet that would tell them all about the work saving options the items offered:

““How to be a Part Time Housewife” Send for a free booklet with dozens of ideas to save you time, work and money- pictures and facts about Coolerator’s look-to-the-future appliances. It’s a gold mine of suggestions for making kitchens brighter-housework lighter.”

The ultimate goal of using technology to ease work was the creation of leisure time. Youngstown Kitchens ran an ad in the March 1953 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* that advertised electric additions to their already amazingly functional kitchen cabinets and layouts (see image 14)⁵⁴. The new dishwasher and “food waste disposal” were “Kitchen Luxury you can afford!”. But the value went beyond luxury: “ here are time-saving, work-saving conveniences that speed you through kitchen

⁵² Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 258.

⁵³ Coolerator Advertisement, March 1953, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 135.

⁵⁴ Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement, March 1953, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 151.

hours, that give you new leisure time.” Part and parcel with all these new work easing and leisure creating items was the ability of the buyer to participate in one of the most valuable tenets of capitalism of the decade: the exercising of free choice. That there were choices that the buyer could make to customize items to fit their needs and fancies was paramount. To meet this desire to personalize and express individual choice, appliances started coming out in a range of colors, whereas before they had all, essentially, only come in basic white. General Electric’s 1958 ad in the April 1958 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* featured a kitchen further modernized by replacing the range with a separate oven built in the wall and a cooktop set into the counter (see image 15)⁵⁵. Each was available in “in Canary Yellow, Petal Pink, Woodtone Brown, Turquoise Green, White or Satin Chrome.”.

Cheerful pastel colors dominated the nineteen-fifties. The pinks, yellows and blues that appliances newly came in were echoed in most of the consumer goods of the decade. Clothing, paint colors and automobiles were now all produced in a range of brightly hued pastels. The new popular colors captured the exuberance of nineteen-fifties Americans better than darker or neutral tones and were able to appear more frequently and appealingly as color film and printing further developed. Consumers also actively asked for the greater use of color in their goods, especially for goods that had only come in standard white or subdued darks (such as kitchen appliances and automobiles). Within the kitchen space, pastel colors also served to cast a veneer of American-ness on a space that was largely a reiteration of European design. By using baby pinks, robin’s egg blues and sunshine yellows for

⁵⁵ General Electric Advertisement, April 1958, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 78.

appliances, cabinets and counters manufacturers were able to counter the stark Bauhaus-inspired efficiency that kitchens were based on and add a sense of joy and free-spiritedness to the kitchen space. Pastel colors emphasized that an item, the consumer's lifestyle and America were modern and better⁵⁶.

The element of pride was also present in the acquisition of kitchen appliances. The pride aspect in the advertisements reveals a bit of an unseemly, yet unsurprising, undercurrent in the outfitting of the home. One-up-manship of the neighbors often guided purchasing of goods in the nineteen-fifties. It was not enough to keep up with the Joneses, one had to top them as well. Pride was the main feature of the tagline the St. Charles Kitchen's ad in the April 1951 issue of *American Home*: "Who wouldn't be proud? When you know in your heart, it's the best!"⁵⁷. Much of this pride was garnered by the fact that the homeowners (exercising their right to free choice) had had a direct hand in the planning of the kitchen, "you, yourself, guide every step of it's planning, before your St Charles kitchen is ever built. *You* choose its colors, from ten that St Charles offers you. *You* select the material...". But the real selling point was that a "St Charles kitchen will assure your enduring satisfaction and earn all the envious adjectives your friends can think of!". The satisfaction of having the best appeared in the ad copy for Frigidaire's electric ranges in the November 1953 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* as well (see image 16)⁵⁸. Finding an elegance in their new range with side-by-side ovens, created with "exclusive Quick-Clean construction" consumers were asked to

⁵⁶ Marling, 40.

⁵⁷ St. Charles Kitchens Advertisement, April 1951, *American Home*, 89.

⁵⁸ Frigidaire Advertisement, November 1953, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 27.

imagine the range in their own home: “Just picture this glamorous Frigidaire Deluxe Electric Range in your own kitchen. You honestly get a glow of pride just *thinking* about owning it.”

An unsurprising result of this extreme focus on the ability, right and virtual responsibility that consumers had to buy happiness was the pervasiveness of planned obsolescence for goods in the nineteen-fifties. Superficial aspects like color and pattern were constantly changing to match seasonal color trends and encourage the matching of appliances to a room that now regularly went through re-decoration⁵⁹. Technical innovation offered appliances that heated more quickly, timed things more accurately and had more general features with each yearly model. Items and floor plans were never considered permanent. A newer version was always coming out and newer was always better. Things were not kept until they did not work anymore; they were kept until something better came along – which was often⁶⁰.

With all this innovation and redesigning, the decade saw the development of many new items that offered solutions to problems that never existed. General Electric was particularly at the forefront of the creation of unique items “for which nobody had been clamoring but for which a market niche might be carved out”⁶¹. The General Electric table-top rotisserie oven advertised in the April 1958 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* could roast meat with or without the rotisserie mechanism as well as bake items and was ideal in that it was “wonderfully portable

⁵⁹ Hine, 21.

⁶⁰ Marling, 265.

⁶¹ Hine, 59.

so you're not tied down to the kitchen...", making it "...Grand for entertaining indoors or out."⁶² Two years prior to their advertising the solution for those who wished to be able to bake a soufflé outside, General Electric also offered an answer to those who were tired of having to open the refrigerator door and lean over to see what foods they had on hand (see image 17)⁶³. Having "All foods at your eyelevel in the new General Electric Wall Refrigerator-Freezer" and freed-up counter space were the touted benefits of this wall strainer and refrigerator repairman's nightmare⁶⁴. General Electric was not the only transgressor in the innovation gone mad trend of the nineteen-fifties. The portable electric skillet was an item that several companies produced in answer to the call, that no one had made, to be able to fry eggs and bacon right at the breakfast table⁶⁵.

In Defense of Consumerism:

The massive consumerism, encouragement of competition and impractical gadgetry has lent the decade a dubious legacy that often leads to a pejorative attitude towards nineteen-fifties American culture. However, there are several points to consider that may amend this harsh view. Firstly, the rationing of material and industry for the war effort had created a real vacuum of goods. Any item that had required metal and assembly plant space to make it, had been deferred for the creation of items for the war effort. Following the end of the war and the return of

⁶² General Electric Advertisement, April 1958, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 56.

⁶³ General Electric Advertisement, November 1956, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 36.

⁶⁴ The advertisement indicates the close relationship that manufacturers had with magazine publishers and editors. *Better Homes and Gardens* produced a widely used cookbook with a very distinct red-and-white checked cover. On the counter in the ad is a very similar book. Just as today, magazines and manufacturers worked in synchronicity to cross-promote themselves.

⁶⁵ Marling, 267.

such items it is not surprising that Americans would focus their new monetary wealth on replacing and procuring items that had been unavailable for so long⁶⁶. In *Better Homes and Gardens* April 1946 issue Crane manufacturing promised consumers that they would soon be able to enjoy Crane items for kitchens, bathrooms and home heating: "Crane is now in production on new equipment for your home. Obviously, everyone cannot be supplied at once; it is going to be some time before production can keep pace with demand..."⁶⁷. Secondly, the vast majority of spending was focused on the home with the idea that the purchasing of items would support and enrich the family unit. Admittedly, almost anything that family members touched or that somehow elaborated the home could be justified as being for the family. However the important aspect was that whether it was a new stove, refrigerator, car, boat, hi-fi, painting or swimming pool these items were used by the family either in the home or when the family was together. By encouraging togetherness items were seen as strengthening the family unit⁶⁸.

A third point to consider is what an uneasy realm the suburbs presented for their new inhabitants. For the majority of homebuyers in new subdivisions, like Levittown, the residents had only a few things in common to connect themselves to one another. While many were new families with young children, and of similar economic levels, they came from disparate backgrounds and locations. Families that moved from the cities and the country both left behind the extended families and ethnic groups that had guided their social norms and established their standards of

⁶⁶ Jackson, 23.

⁶⁷ Crane Advertisement, March 1946, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 81.

⁶⁸ Tyler May, 148.

living⁶⁹. Many new suburbanites had truly limited contact with their pre-suburban family and friends. Frequent drives back and forth were impractical for most with their small children and new homes that needed caring for. Even in the nineteen-sixties it was considered a long distance call for homeowners in New Jersey's Levittown to call into the city. If suburbanites wanted to speak to their city friends or relations several times a week it could create a monthly phone bill of about twenty dollars⁷⁰, which would be the equivalent of one hundred and fifty dollars today⁷¹. Once they were in their new suburban communities, a way to unify and find commonality with one another was through consumerism. The process of picking out and buying similar items created a shared experience that helped people relate to each other⁷².

Additionally, with so many items for the home offering the ability to exercise personal choice through customizable style and color, what a family chose to buy could help to give them some sort of individuality in the often characterless world of suburbia. The assembly line system of rapid home building at the lowest cost possible, that builders like Levitt and Sons used, left little in the way of style or character for the homes. Homes on the streets of the new suburban landscape took on a repetitive cookie cutter quality of boxy shapes all in a row⁷³. In a world of sameness one of the few ways people could distinguish themselves was through the objects they chose to buy, even if they were buying the same item as almost all their

⁶⁹ Hine, 24.

⁷⁰ Gans, 242.

⁷¹ Dave Maunel, *DaveMaunel.com*, <http://www.davemaunel.com/inflation-calculator.php>.

⁷² Harris, "The House I Live In", 202.

⁷³ Marling, 262

neighbors but were just choosing a different color from the set palette of pastels offered.

The rampant consumerism and the homogenized quality of life that was occurring as a result of the spread of suburban ideals were not lost on contemporary observers. Critic Lewis Mumford found Levittown and other post-war subdivisions of its ilk to be “socially backward” in design and “too congested for variety and too spread out for social interaction.”⁷⁴ In his 1958 book *The Affluent Society* economist Kenneth Galbraith stated his belief that the basic concerns of human existence (food, clothing and shelter) had already been met for most of America. What was driving consumer spending now was not the meeting of necessary needs but the meeting of false needs created by manufacturers⁷⁵. The methods of these manufacturers had been exposed to the public in 1957 in Vance Packard’s book *The Hidden Persuaders*. Packard revealed that advertisers played on consumers deep seated psychological wants and bombarded them with subliminal messages to get them to buy things, that (according to Galbraith) they did not really need⁷⁶.

Despite these condemnations and revelations, there was a distinctly common thought that consumerism was a positive aspect of American life; and it did not need to be tempered. In fact, after the end of the war, the pervading social opinion was that by buying new items Americans were working to jump-start the economy.

⁷⁴ Harris, 206.

⁷⁵ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society Fortieth Anniversary Edition*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998),158.

⁷⁶ David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon and the Fight for Civil Rights in America’s Legendary Suburb*, (New York: Walker and Co., 2009), 75.

Refurnishing a home following the years of the Great Depression and WWII would stimulate mass-production and create new jobs⁷⁷. The ability to mass produce a wealth of items at a low enough cost for virtually all to afford them was cause for celebration. To close out the end of the decade *Life* dedicated their final issue of 1959 to “The Good Life”. To the editors of this widely read and highly influential publication, America had reached an apex of success not enjoyed by any other nation. The cover of the issue was a fold-out of a myriad number of shots of people swimming, ice skating, dancing and reading to highlight how “zestful American’s enjoy their new leisure”⁷⁸. The reason for this was stated in one of the main articles in the issue, “Cause of Breakthrough Towards Life of Plenty”. The cause was due to the development of automation, which “For US consumers ...has loosened a fresh windfall of inexpensive goods, many entirely new, to bring more comfort and enjoyment to daily life.”⁷⁹. The result of all this new leisure, brought about by the now affordable home goods such as push-button stoves and dishwashers, was expanded on in a further article, titled “Leisure Could Mean a Better Civilization”⁸⁰. While leisure had been wrought through the use of items that had culminated in the development of a consumer-based society, *Life* magazine saw no shame or downside to a devotion to things and living the good life. Rather, to them leisure provided the necessary time to devote one self to the creation of a more evolved civilization:

“Is it true, as Professor Galbraith argues in his *Affluent Society*, that our legitimate wants are long since sated and that we are now being corrupted by inducements to buy things we don’t need... Affluence may indeed multiply

⁷⁷ Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, 113

⁷⁸ *Life*, “Special Issue: The Good Life” December 28, 1959.

⁷⁹ *Life*, “Cause of Breakthrough Toward Life of Plenty”, December 28, 1959, 36.

⁸⁰ *Life*, “Leisure Could Mean a Better Civilization”, December 28, 1959, 62.

temptations and trivialities, but it also extends our command of the arts and products that enhance life and adorn virtues as well as vice...Let's not blame affluence as such; we need more of it not less. Our problem is rather to transcend it and use it for the purpose of our civilization."⁸¹

In the mid twentieth-century American mindset, consumption and leisure were not equated with ideas of greed or sloth. Rather, consumption was tied to participating in the modern good life, where one could, and should, exercise one's democratic right to pick and choose which bright candy colored technological innovation one wanted so as to allow more free time in which to develop American culture and civilization. Buying an open plan home for your new family and discussing the choice of a pink General Electric oven or a yellow Hotpoint with a neighbor was not an act of conforming to an advertiser's manipulation of popular tastes; it was celebrating and helping America.

⁸¹ Ibid.

This lovely kitchen centers around a 54" Diana Cabinet Sink. All-steel, it features stainless-steel trim; porcelain-enameled steel top; new one-handle faucet with 5-year parts warranty; hose spray; cutlery drawer and cutting-board drawer.

Rotary Corner base cabinet has shelves that turn to bring wanted items up front.

Modernizing, start with a Youngstown Kitchens Cabinet Sink from 24" to 66" wide—in lovely Star White, Dawn Yellow, or Meridian Blue.

New Youngstown-Tappan built-in ovens and surface-cooking units (gas or electric) match other units. You get more freedom than ever before in planning for cooking facilities.

Why you see quality-built Youngstown Kitchens in thousands of the finest new homes

Only Youngstown Kitchens give you so much convenience, such beautiful colors... so many features that add to the value of your home!

This week end, why not visit the model homes in your community? You'll find a world of exciting new ideas—like the beautifully styled Youngstown Kitchens, for example—you'll see them in more fine homes than ever before!

Why? They're built for lasting pleasure—of lifetime steel that will never warp, rot, swell, or absorb odors. They're so flexible that every plan is a custom plan—every kitchen a personal kitchen. And, of course, builders know the home with a Youngstown Kitchen keeps its value longer!

Take a hint from leading builders. Whether you buy or modernize, don't settle for less than a Youngstown steel Kitchen!

Youngstown Kitchens

FOR THAT NEW HOME LOOK

Sold in the United States, Canada, and most parts of the world. Check the Yellow Pages of your phone book, or call OPERATOR 25, Western Union, for name of nearest Youngstown Kitchens dealer.
YOUNGSTOWN KITCHENS DIVISION OF AMERICAN-STANDARD, WARREN, OHIO

© 1956 Youngstown Kitchens
Youngstown Kitchens,
Dept. A-424, Warren, Ohio
Please send me illustrated book on Youngstown Kitchens.
I enclose 10¢ in coin to cover mailing.

NAME (Please print) _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE _____
COUNTY _____ STATE _____

Image 10: Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement. Source: *American Home* April, 1956, 101.

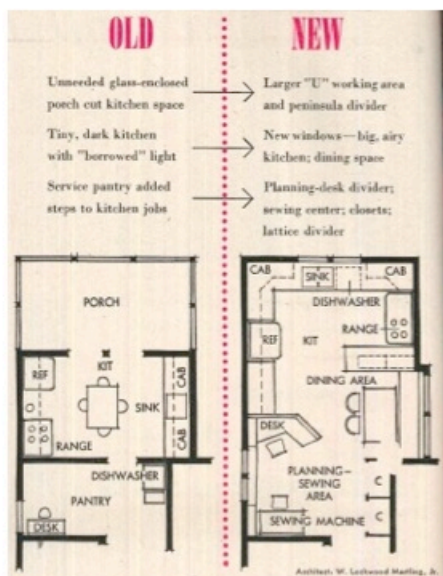


Image 11

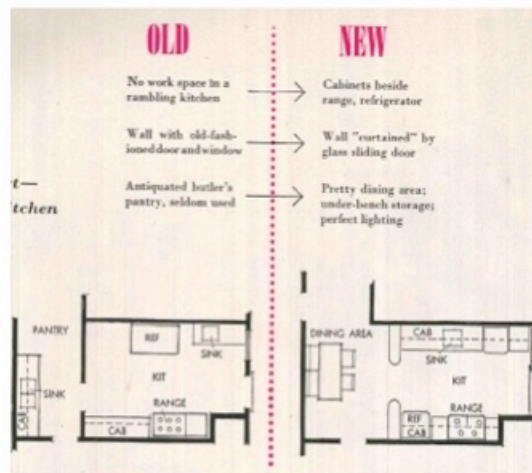


Image 12

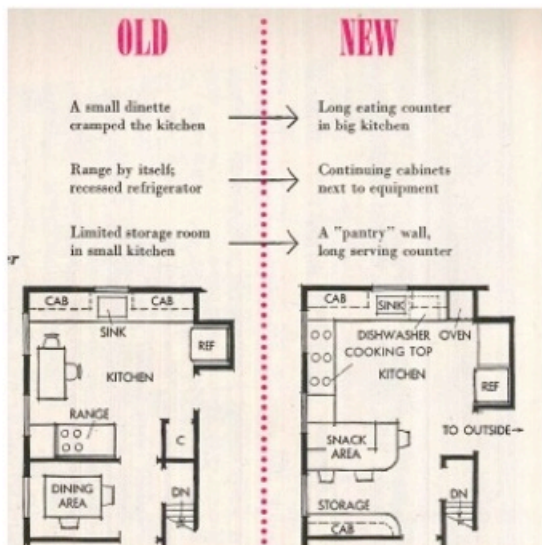


Image 13

Images 11-13: Re-modeled kitchens. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, November, 1953, 65.

Kitchen luxury you can afford!

\$100⁰⁰
FOR YOUR OLD SINK
 when you buy

Youngstown Kitchens
JET-TOWER
DISHWASHER

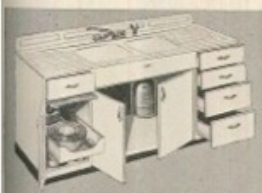


(Disposer, rinse spray at extra cost.)

Watch your local newspapers for announcements of thousands of dealers who are making this offer.

Never wash dishes by hand again! Youngstown Kitchens Jet-Tower* Dishwasher does them all for you in just 9 1/2 minutes! And they're done hygienically clean, sparkling bright in booster-heated water, hotter than hands can stand!

It's the greatest timesaving, work-saving appliance ever... and it's yours at a special-savings price. See exciting Jet-Tower* Dishwashing in action today. Hurry... this offer closes May 2nd, 1953.



Youngstown Kitchen Cabinet Sink, 44" Deluxe Type. One of 12 luxury models. Top of one-piece, acid-resisting porcelain-enamelled steel. Two bowls, twin drain-wards, sliding shelf, swinging mixing-faucet, rinse spray, cutting board, many other deluxe features. Youngstown Kitchens Disposer at extra cost.



This lovely, all-steel Youngstown Kitchen features the Electric Sink with Jet-Tower* Dishwasher.

YOUR dream kitchen... your beautiful Youngstown Kitchen... can come true at a price well within your budget!

And here's more than luxury! Here are timesaving, work-saving conveniences that speed you through kitchen hours, that give you new leisure time.

Wall and base cabinets are custom-planned to fit your needs, placed just right to save steps, stooping and stretching. You get broad counter areas and roomy storage space. Baked-on enamel finishes wipe clean easily. Drawers glide open and shut easily,

even when fully loaded; doors will not buckle, close firmly on silent torpedo catches.

Your lovely, luxurious Youngstown Kitchen makes your home worth more and is built of sturdy steel to last a lifetime.

There's a kitchen planning expert near you who can show you how a Youngstown Kitchen can be installed for less than you'd think. Send coupon.

MULLINS MANUFACTURING CORPORATION
 WARREN, OHIO
 Youngstown Kitchens are sold throughout the World

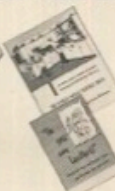
**LET ME BE
 YOUR GARBAGE
 MAN!**

**YOUNGSTOWN KITCHENS
 NEW
 FOOD WASTE DISPOSER**

No more garbage! Youngstown Kitchens new Food Waste Disposer shreds away all food waste before it can become stale, unpleasant garbage. And the wonderful, new features mean savings for you on installation costs. Easy to use, and 3 ways best: continuous food, double-action shredding, self-cleaning action.



GET THESE EXCITING HOME-PLANNING GUIDES!




"The World's Newest Kitchen Ideas". You'll find new ideas in kitchen planning and decorating... how to plan your beautiful dream kitchen for the greatest efficiency, perfect convenience. Please enclose 10c to cover mailing cost.

"Do Your Own Landlord". If you plan to buy or build, as indicated by your check mark on the coupon, we will also send this 44-page book. It's loaded with facts you will want to know about home ownership. Find out what to expect in today's house and how you can save money by buying now.

*Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

Call Western Union, Operator 25, and without charge get the name of a nearby dealer.

 **Youngstown Kitchens**

BETTER HOMES & GARDENS, MARCH, 1953

Mullins Manufacturing Corporation
 Dept. 8-353, Warren, Ohio

Send kitchen-planning idea book. I enclose 10c to cover cost of mailing. [No stamps, please.]

I plan to buy a house I plan to modernize I plan to build a house

NAME (Please print) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____

COUNTY _____ STATE _____

© 1953 Mullins Manufacturing Corporation

151

Image 14: Youngstown Kitchens Advertisement. Source: Better Homes and Gardens March, 1953, 151.

Yes, it's the same kitchen
... but the range has been changed!



Your kitchen... for less money and trouble than you dream! Oven and cooktop can be installed easily as shown.

New 1958 General Electric Built-in Ranges

Give any kitchen new custom-beauty—give every cook that gourmet-touch



Roast or broil... rare, medium or well done... automatically with electric meat thermometer. Just dial your preference... a buzzer lets you know when meat is ready.



Pushbutton cooking... fast, clean, controlled... with up-front controls on drop-in cooktop. Remote control cooktops also available. All in 4 colors, white or satin chrome.



Peek without opening the picture-window oven door! Push-button floodlight provides plenty of light. 21-inch oven has electric rotisserie, automatic oven timer.

There's brand new beauty in the kitchen—brand new pleasure in cooking wherever a G-E Built-in Range is installed! Wonderfully automatic features give your cooking that gourmet-touch!

Your G-E dealer will help select the model best suited to your needs! Choice of ovens and cooktops; in Canary Yellow, Petal Pink, Woodtone Brown, Turquoise Green, White or Satin Chrome.

Easy credit terms for range alone... or complete kitchen modernization. Range Department, General Electric Co., Louisville 1, Kentucky. *Live better... electrically.*

GENERAL  **ELECTRIC**

Image 15: General Electric Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens* April, 1958, 78.

New Frigidaire Electric Range has everything to make your cooking easy, accurate—fun!



Beautiful new 2-oven DeLuxe Range — with the easiest-to-clean ovens ever made!



Everything slides out quickly, easily, for "stand-up" cleaning — shelves, guides, drip tray.



No more scraping or scrubbing hard-to-reach oven parts. Wash 'em in the sink like a pot or pan!



How simple to clean the porcelain oven with everything out! No corners, no crevices. It's smooth!



HERE ARE TWO OVENS . . . big, roomy ovens . . . that are really fun to use!

These ovens not only roast or bake or broil to perfection—but, thanks to their exclusive Quick-Clean construction, they clean far more easily, with less work, than any other oven made.

Here's why. Shelves, guides, the full-width oven drip tray . . . all glide out for easy cleaning. And the ovens themselves haven't a bump, bulge, or square corner to trap grease or spillage. They're the easiest cleaning ovens ever made.

In addition, you get the famous Cook-Master Oven Clock Control that gets you

out of the kitchen. Plus four 5-Speed Radiant Surface Units for top-notch top-of-the-range cooking. Plus Full-width Fluorescent Cooking-Top Lamp and 2-Speed Electric Time-Signal. Plus economical Thrifto-Mat Switch in the so-handly Deep-Well Thermic Cooker. Plus full-width, finger tip roll-up Storage Drawer.

There are so many, many other wonderful features that have been built into America's most beautiful, most serviceable electric range. Just picture this glamorous Frigidaire DeLuxe Electric Range in your own kitchen. You honestly get a glow of pride just thinking about owning it.

Ask your Frigidaire Dealer to show you all the Frigidaire Electric Ranges. Look for his name in the Yellow Pages of the phone book. Or, for a free descriptive folder, write Frigidaire, Dept. 2177, Dayton 1, Ohio. In Canada, Toronto 13, Ontario.

Enjoy Arthur Godfrey's daytime show on TV or radio. Or on Saturday afternoons, see General Motors' "TV Football Game of the Week." Consult local papers for time and station.

Frigidaire *Electric* Ranges



Built and backed by General Motors

Image 16: Frigidaire Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens* November, 1953, 27.

WALL REFRIGERATOR-FREEZER

New General Electric Wall Refrigerator-Freezer comes in Mix-or-Match colors: Canary Yellow, Turquoise Green, Petal Pink, Woodtone Brown—or White.

All foods at your eye level

in the new General Electric Wall Refrigerator-Freezer

Everything is within easy reach—at your eye level—in this General Electric Wall Refrigerator-Freezer.

And see how much valuable work surface you gain directly under the refrigerator! That's because this wonderful appliance hangs on your wall like a cabinet, with a simple but sturdy bracket.

So roomy, too! You get a big 11 cubic feet of space for storing both fresh and frozen food. And for extra

convenience, you can add one or two 5-cubic-foot General Electric Roll-Out Freezers under the counter, in place of floor cabinets, as shown.

Let your G-E dealer show you how easily you can transform your kitchen with this new Wall Refrigerator.

Ask about his easy terms and trade-in allowance. Household Refrigerator Dept., General Electric Company, Appliance Park, Louisville 1, Kentucky.

Progress Is Our Most Important Product

GENERAL ELECTRIC

Before. An outdated kitchen like this can be modernized with just a few simple changes, adding new color, new beauty and a new look . . . at little remodeling expense. Just see how the kitchen at the right has been transformed.

After. A truly modern kitchen because the Wall Refrigerator makes it so. Notice the new planning desk providing valuable extra counter surface. Your General Electric dealer will show you how easily and quickly this can be done at reasonable cost.

Complete unit: 64" long, 39½" high, 17¾" deep. **1.** 11-cubic-foot capacity. **2.** Automatic-defrost refrigerator section. **3.** Magnetic Safety Doors. **4.** Fruit and vegetable compartments. **5.** Adjustable door shelves. **6.** True zero-degree freezer. **7.** Mini-Cube ice trays. **8.** Sealed-in refrigeration system. **9.** 5-cubic-foot General Electric Roll-Out Freezer.

36

BETTER HOMES & GARDENS, NOVEMBER, 1956

Image 17: General Electric Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens* November, 1956, 36.

Chapter 3: Art and the Nineteen-Fifties Kitchen: Celebrating Freedom with the Kitchen Wallpaper

“America is entering a new and exciting era of Free Taste.”
House Beautiful, October 1952⁸²

The art of the nineteen-fifties (that supposedly developed out of the affluence of the decade, according to *Life*) is one of the areas of mid-century culture that is lauded today. The work of artists like Jackson Pollock and the modern designs of figures such as Charles and Ray Eames feature prominently in histories of American art and design. Respectively celebrated as seminal movements in the history of art and reproduced as retro chic additions to contemporary homes, the art and designs of the nineteen-fifties stand apart from the push-button stoves and pink refrigerators of the era. They have connotations of being the ‘better’ half of the history of American material culture for the decade. Rather than being indicative of mass consumption and the conformity of suburbia they stand for intellectual and artistic innovation in the wider world history of modern art and design.

It may surprise some that the worlds of the suburban kitchen, esoteric art movements and groundbreaking designers did overlap in the nineteen-fifties. Aspects and versions of each made their way into the homes and mindsets of the masses. In October of 1952 *House Beautiful* devoted its entire issue to “What is Happening To American Tastes?”. One of the features was the “Editor’s Forecast of the new Taste Cycle”⁸³. Based upon four years of “taking yearly ‘soundings’ in both the *direction of change* and *the rate of change* of public preferences.”, the editor

⁸² Elizabeth Gordon, “What is Happening to American Tastes?” *House Beautiful* October 1952, 173.

⁸³ Elizabeth Gordon, “The Editor’s Forecast of the New Taste Cycle”, *House Beautiful*, October 1952, 182.

offered a prediction of what future taste in home decorating would be. The design tenets for the coming era would involve: “The great preference for texture, real or simulated. The growing love of soft sculpted forms. The strong preference for the colors of the landscape.” (see image 18). The visible texture, lively colors (dominated by pastels) and curving forms that the editors saw as defining the era are the same aspects that can be found in the modern art and design of the nineteen-fifties. The paintings of Jackson Pollock have a highly textural quality to them while Willem de Kooning’s works contain the bright colors and biomorphic forms that both Finn Juhl and Isamu Noguchi also brought to their furniture design (see images 19-21).

The biomorphic shapes and sense of texture were ultimately derived from Surrealist art. Surrealism had entered on the American scene in the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties when artists such as Dali, Ernst and Roberto Matta began to emigrate from Europe to avoid fascism. The open-ended biomorphic forms of Surrealism ostensibly came from these artists’ psychologically revelatory dreams. Surrealists used seemingly random rubbings and amorphous smears, created through such techniques as frottage and decalcomania, to stimulate their subconscious. While influential on the development of Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism was also still popular on its own right well into the nineteen-fifties⁸⁴.

Armstrong’s flooring and kitchen designs of the nineteen-fifties show a strong awareness of modern trends that *House Beautiful* ascribed. In a kitchen combining both modern and traditional aspects, the brick of the wall and the

⁸⁴ Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 124.

smoothness of the wooden cabinets create textural contrast (see image 22). The colors and splotches in the linoleum harken to the colors and forms of Clyfford Still (see image 24). The “soft, sculpted forms” can be seen in the rounded triangle shaped chairs at the counter and the George Nelson ball clock above the far wall (see image 23). Similarly, Armstrong’s *Spatter* pattern for linoleum (available in seven different color bases and offering the “newest style effect”) has a distinct sympathy to Jackson Pollock’s famous drip effect abstract works (see image 25).

Outside of the advertisement realm, the kitchens featured in home magazines also contained influences of the more prestigious realms of art and design. A homeowner’s kitchen in the November 1956 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* features a breakfast bar that undulates out in a biomorphic form similar to Isamu Noguchi’s famous 1948 coffee table that Herman Miller produced for the mass market (see images 26 and 28). Placed at the breakfast bar are rounded edge chairs with clearly visible metal rod frames with exposed screws set in a T shape on the back that have a distinct similarity to the work of Charles and Ray Eames (see image 27). Texture and “colors of the landscape” are brought in to the kitchen with the cabinets having a sketchy green style of painting on them that is reminiscent of the color field works of abstract artist Barnett Newman (see image 29). The textural quality of another reader’s kitchen from the March 1956 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* had a similarly simulated textural quality to the floor (see image 30). The table and chairs seem to be a hybridization of the Eames’ work with molded plastics and metal strutting, here pared down to a more simplified placement of metal supports (see image 32). The wallpaper of the kitchen seems to be a series of

brightly colored biomorphic shapes, evocative of Surrealism and the later work of Ellsworth Kelly (see image 31).

The images used in earlier sections of this thesis also show these stylistic concerns. The American Kitchens ad from March of 1951 features a 'before' kitchen with plain floor and pink curtains matched with a pull down shade (see image 5). In the 'after' kitchen, that would allow the homemaker to "never again face the embarrassment of trying to hide your ugly old-fashioned kitchen", the plain floor has been replaced with a linoleum pattern with a sense of texture implied in it and the curtains now have a bold series of horizontal lines and are combined with the more modern venetian blinds.

The promotional image of a Levittown kitchen from the early nineteen-fifties shows a similar love of texture (see image 6). The patterning of the linoleum is virtually the same as the one in the American Kitchens ad, with its sketchy elongated splotches of lighter colors on a dark background – much like a re-tooled Clyfford Still work. The smoothness of the enamel kitchen appliances and cabinets are contrasted with actual rough texture of the brick wall above the fireplace as well as the floors simulated texture. Surrealist biomorphic forms are brought in with the seemingly abstract polished piece of wood that hangs above the fireplace.

Images such as these could seem to indicate a close awareness and interest on the part of nineteen-fifties consumers with the most up-to-date works in the fine art and design movements. Ostensibly, further support of this tempting conceit is found among the articles and images in magazines. *Life* would regularly run features that exposed readers to the work of designers, such as their September 1950 look at

Charles Eames in “A Designer’s Home of His Own”⁸⁵. *Better Homes and Gardens* extolled the value of bringing art into the home in an April 1958 article on how “Art Appreciation Begins at Home”, written to relate the benefit of exposing children to art⁸⁶.

But as appealing as it would be to use these as indications of a heretofore unrealized mass interest by nineteen-fifties popular culture in the value of contemporary art and design it is not actually possible to do so. Jackson Pollock-like linoleum and Isamu Noguchi inspired forms were indeed present in the kitchens of the average American, but they were not the only style present. They were joined throughout the decade with the next-door neighbor’s early American kitchen (see images 33 and 34). While modern forms would abound in one person’s home, copper kettles, strap hinges and brick facades would be present in another’s. Kitchens were just as likely to invoke the ponderosa, as they were the color fields and drips of modern art. Even when occurring with the trappings of early American life the basic layout of the kitchen still maintained the use of built-in features, ample workspace and efficient design that the Bauhaus and the Frankfurt Kitchen had established. As both were regularly included in the pages of home magazines through both advertisements and featured reader’s homes it would seem that each were equally stylistically popular and acceptable⁸⁷.

Closer reading of the articles that featured and celebrated art and design in magazines reveal that less text was devoted to the intellectual qualities of color and

⁸⁵ *Life*, “A Designer’s Home of His Own”, September 11, 1950, 148.

⁸⁶ *Better Homes and Gardens*, “Art Appreciation Begins at Home”, April, 1958, 6.

⁸⁷ Hine, 8.

form or the nature of representation than was given to issues of commerce and home decoration. *Life* was less concerned about Eames's process or the newness of his forms, but focused on his creation of items that could be had by all: "... Eames is so interested in making the products of his drawing board available at the lowest cost that the modest retail price of his newest chair (\$32.50) bothers him...Eames likes to say his job is 'the simple one of getting the most of the best to the greatest number of people for the least.'"⁸⁸. For *Better Homes and Gardens*, art appreciation at home was not about exposing children to the creation of art, the concepts of color and space or even the history of art. It was about renting original works of art on a monthly basis from libraries, museums and galleries. Creating a complementary tableau of items around the ever-changing artwork would continually liven up the home, individualize it and act as a conversation starter: "Through a local art center, this homemaker selected a painting which she especially liked. The contemporary painting becomes a conversation piece, noticed immediately."⁸⁹.

In fact, modern art movements were met with distrust by much of the public during the nineteen-fifties. The open-ended forms and unclear meanings of abstract art created by artists living the bohemian life in New York were seen as possible tools of subversion.⁹⁰ The fear was that the unclear images, dynamic slashes of paint and vibrant colors were agents that "threatened to destroy by 'designed disorder', 'depravity' and 'decadence'"⁹¹. Despite being antithetical to the Social

⁸⁸ *Life*, "A Designer's Home of his Own", 152.

⁸⁹ *Better Homes and Gardens*, "Art Appreciation Begins at Home", 6.

⁹⁰ Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 133.

⁹¹ Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000*, (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1999), 35.

Realism movement that the USSR mandated as the ‘correct’ form of art⁹², the real fear of modern art was that it was somehow going to convert Americans to communism⁹³. As the decade progressed this extreme rhetoric began to diminish only to resurge again at the end of the decade when the USSR’s power seemed to grow with their launch of Sputnik in 1957⁹⁴.

The visual effect of the decoration of the kitchen was more important than being true to artistic movements and the latest designs. In November 1953 *Better Homes and Gardens* ran a feature on a unique lower level living space in “You’d never Guess It’s A Basement”, of which the kitchen area featured a hand painted abstract mural (see image 35)⁹⁵. While the magazine did make note of this, and feature it as a plus for the remodeled space, it did not use it as an example to encourage readers to commission original works of art on their own. Rather, it felt using “a panel of interesting wallpaper.” could create the same visual impact. While consumers would have had a working familiarity with current art and design trends, thanks to coverage of them in periodicals, such objects of striking similarity in their homes should not be taken as indicating a widespread allegiance to any art movement or designers precepts. The most likely path that such inspired items took to get into the home was that of a trickle down effect of moving from their original artists and designers, through the design departments of mass production manufacturers and into the home of consumers.

⁹² Michael L. Kreen, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005),156.

⁹³ Jack Massy and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, (Baden: Lars Muller Publishers, 2008), 232.

⁹⁴ Phillips, *The American Century*, 38.

⁹⁵ Dorothy Miller, “You’d never guess it’s a basement”, *Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1953, 218.

However, the presence of such items in people's homes indicates more than just a passive consumption of things regardless of their beginnings. The mix of forms and styles that could be present in the kitchen is indicative of the ideal of exercising personal freedom that was celebrated in the nineteen-fifties. *House Beautiful's* October 1952 issue states that America was set to begin an era of an 'anything goes' taste mentality that would allow people the freedom to express their individuality:

"America is entering a new and exciting era of Free Taste. Americans are declaring their independence from the dictates of convention and achieving open-mindedness and freedom from rules and clichés...so we are mixing the best of the past with the best of the present, creating a *free*, new look. You will find in this issue a record and forecast of American taste – your taste... All through the magazine you will recognize your own preferences, because you, and only you are dictating American style."⁹⁶

The previously introduced Youngstown Kitchens ad from April of 1956 exemplifies this "free taste" (see image 10). It participates in all the predicted style concerns of four years prior. The faux brick flooring provides a textural contrast to the smooth all-steel cabinets. Bright natural colors abound with the mix of blue, green and brick red. Softly curving forms meet modernity with the cabinet and drawer pulls shaped into dynamic boomerangs of shining steel. However, there is not a single style that dominates the kitchen. The windows have diagonal muntins creating a large-scale diamond pattern that are most likely meant to evoke ideas of colonial era homes, as does the 'brick' floor. The lighting fixtures that flank the sink would be more appropriately seen on the outside of a nineteenth-century carriage house while those above the dining table drip and curve downward with floral

⁹⁶ Gordon, "What is Happening to American Tastes?", 173.

aspects more common to Art Nouveau. The strip of steel that rims the counter top stems from the nineteen-thirties but now comes to sharp angles at the corners in the more dynamic style of the nineteen-fifties.

The following year *House Beautiful* argued that its readers must hold fast to their right to mix and match colors, forms and styles in their homes and kitchens. The minimal and functional homes of the International Modern movement that were popular in the European design world were seen as a subversive threat to the American way. Seemingly unaware that they stemmed from the very same Frankfurt kitchen that inspired America's kitchens, the stark colors and clean lines of the practical and uncluttered Bauhaus kitchens were seen as an outside influence trying to place rules and constrictions on the American "free taste" of mixing styles.

It was crucial that Americans must maintain their freedom to clash styles and time periods together and not succumb to the dictates of outsiders: "Freedom, your won freedom of choice – and its consequences – is the only road to personal growth. Your reason, your common sense, is the finest instrument you possess for living. Don't let them take it away." ⁹⁷ By buying items and making the spaces of the home fit their personal style and taste, consumers were exercising their freedom of choice, which was seen as an American right and duty.

⁹⁷ Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 113.



Image 19: Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles 11*, 1952, enamel and aluminum paint with glass on canvas, 212.1 (h) x 488.9 (w) cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Source: <http://nga.gov.au/international/catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=36334&MnuID=2&GalID=1>



Image 20: Willem De Koonig, *Abstraction*, 1949-1950, oil and oleoresin on cardboard, 41 (h) x 49 (w) cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Source: http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha_obra/413.



Image 21: Finn Juhl, *The 108 Dining Chair*, 1946. Source: <http://www.finnjuhl.com/products/model-108/>



Image 22: Armstrong Flooring Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, December 1953, 2.

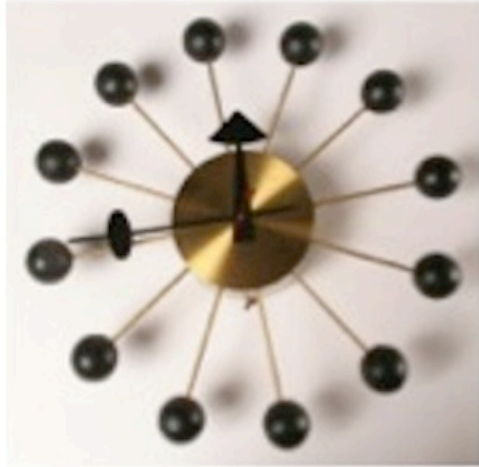


Image 23: George Nelson, *Ball Clock*, 1947. Vitra Design Museum. Source: <http://www.design-museum.de/en/exhibitions/detailseiten/detailseiten/george-nelson.html?desktop=1&cHash=cfd6fe6e81fb960a2cd54becddb8b475>



Image 24: Clyfford Still, *1957-D No. 1*, 1957, oil on canvas, 287 (h) x 403 (w) cm, Albright-Knox Gallery. Source: <http://www.albrightknox.org/collection/collection-highlights/piece:1957-d-no-1/>



Image 25: Armstrong Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1950, 180.



Image 26: Reader's Kitchen. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1956, 80.



Image 27: Charles and Ray Eames, Molded Plywood Dining Chair, 1946. Source: <http://store.hermanmiller.com/store/servlet/DynamicKitDisplayView?langId=-1&storeId=10151&catalogId=10051&categoryId=&dynamicKitId=330>

Image 28: Isamu Noguchi, Coffee Table, 1948.
Source: <http://www.hermanmiller.com/products/desking-tables-and-furniture/occasional-tables/noguchi-table.html>

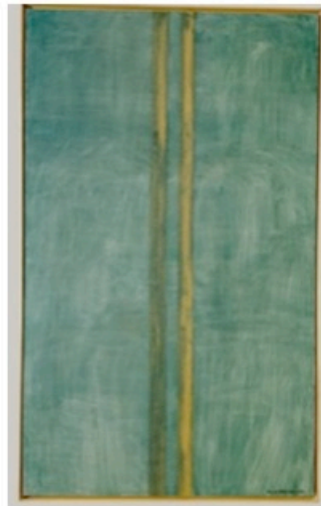


Image 29: Barnett Newman, *Concord*, 1949, oil and masking tape on canvas, 213 (h) x 134 (w) cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/210009935>



Image 30: Reader's Kitchen. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, March 1956, 127.

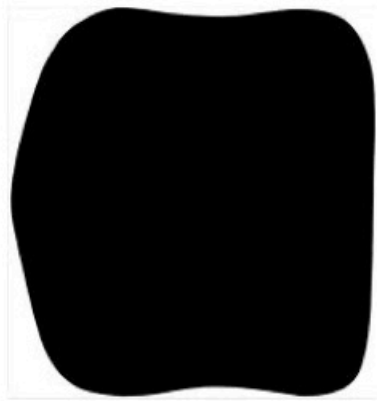


Image 31: Ellsworth Kelly, Black Ripe, 1955, oil on canvas, 160 (h) x 150 (w) cm. Collection of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson. Source: <http://www.arttattler.com/archiveellsworthkelly.html>



Image 32: Charles and Ray Eames, Molded Plastic Side Chair with Wire Base, 1950. Source: <http://store.hermanmiller.com/store/servlet/DynamicKitDisplayView?langId=-1&storeId=10151&catalogId=10051&categoryId=&dynamicKitId=367>.



Image 33: Early American Inspired Kitchen. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, January 1955, 44.



Image 34: Early American Inspired Kitchen, *American Home*, April 1956., 106.



Image 35: Kitchen with abstract mural. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1953, 218.

**Chapter 4:
Being a Housewife In the Nineteen-Fifties**

“What are Women Coming to?

They’ll never lift a finger – except to push ultrasonic, electronic and push-button devices...they’ll put on the roast and let out the dog from a telephone booth downtown...look at the meat counters, the grocery selves; without ever leaving their kitchen... they’ll wave their little white hands over a counter top to answer the phone across the room without ever picking up the receiver...they’ll flash recipes on a color screen, push buttons to measure the ingredients, cook on cold marble and high frequency sound waves will wash the dishes... That’s what women are coming to!”

American Home, April 1956⁹⁸

When considering the American kitchen of the nineteen-fifties an inescapable figure that comes to mind is the nineteen-fifties homemaker. She is easily pictured in the mind’s eye: perfectly coiffed and made up, she clicks through the kitchen in her high heels, turning out elaborate hors d’oeuvres and hearty main courses with her cutting-edge kitchen appliances all the while caring for the children and keeping the house in order, with never a drop of sweat nor a hair out of place. There are two ways to interpret the image of the nineteen-fifties homemaker and they depend on what era she is viewed from. Considered from today’s perspective, she is seen as a symbol of oppression: a woman trapped in the domestic realm of cooking, cleaning and child-care and judged on her ability to maintain her looks. This is a perfectly understandable and, in many ways, correct view to take. Situated as we are in the twenty-first century and having knowledge of the coming women’s movement, we know that the homemaker will start her long escape from the kitchen in the nineteen-sixties. But, if we try and consider the image of the homemaker from the perspective of a mid-century viewer our interpretation is different. She is not a

⁹⁸ *American Home*, “That’s What Women are Coming to!”, April, 1956, 32.

prisoner but a guard of the home. She keeps the home in order, nourishes the family with food, and instills values in the children, all while maintaining her feminine beauty. Though many different factors led to the exodus of women from the kitchen and the home, the advertisements of the decade can reveal the changing view of women during the nineteen-fifties. Manufacturers and advertisers changed the image and popular perception of the housewife as the decade progressed and, ultimately, had a role in her departure from the home.

At the beginning of the decade her role was lauded in popular culture as a vital force for a happy home and national well being. She was given the most sway in the matters of the home and manufacturers began to court her as the decider of what goods to buy. Items were built to meet her needs, ease her workload and provide her with essential leisure time. In these early advertisements she appeared as a well-put together woman; whose fashionable yet practical clothes were covered by an apron and who wore high heels of an appropriate height for working in the home. She was engaged with housework but was enjoying the new appliances that would ease her burdens. As the decade went on manufacturers and advertisers seem to have become caught up in the hype of their products. They made claims that their items were now eliminating work for the housewife all-together, rather than just easing it. Housewives in the advertisements of the later half of the decade began to take off their aprons and sensible shoes in favor of dressing like they were always just stepping away from a cocktail party. Housewives were no longer working in their kitchens; they were now beauty queen accessories to their pink stoves and refrigerators, which did all the work for them. These images began to pervade mid-

century culture and change how housewives perceived themselves and were seen by others. The respect and satisfaction that women had received for their proscribed role as homemaker lessened and removing oneself from the home became the goal of many homemakers.

Housewife as a Bastion of Family Values:

To be a housewife in the nineteen-fifties was to take on a position of national importance. Following the end of WWII, social and government experts encouraged women to dedicate themselves to domesticity and child rearing to ensure the physical, mental and patriotic health of the family⁹⁹. By being present in the home American women could focus on aiding children in their developmental abilities, provide the whole family with proper nutrition and a clean and ordered environment as well as uphold the gender roles that were seen as endemic and essential to the American way of life. In the war against the communists, staying at home was a way women could be sure to teach their children the democratic and patriotic correct way of living and thereby “defeat totalitarian, authoritarian ideas”.¹⁰⁰ The Red Menace that McCarthyism fought against also served to quell leanings women may have had about trying to change their set gender role, lest they were considered un-American¹⁰¹. Homemakers were even informed of their precise role to be played in the event of the ever-looming nuclear disaster. Women were told

⁹⁹ Tyler May, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Susan M. Hartman, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 86.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 85.

that they were particularly crucial for their natural ability to focus on preparing the home by stock piling essential goods and learning to provide medical aid¹⁰².

Beyond the fears of nuclear holocaust and the instilling of American values, housewives could also be a more immediate asset to the success of the husband and the development of a cultured family¹⁰³. In March of 1952 *House Beautiful* ran an article titled: "A Good Cook needs an Audience...or she won't be a good cook anymore"¹⁰⁴. It relates the virtues of a husband taking an interest in, and actively supporting, his wife as she develops her "household arts", particularly her skills as a cook: "A husband who does not support and pay attention to her is putting up a very effective roadblock in the path of his wife's development of the household arts of good living, which could be a social, business and personal asset to him if only he were sensible enough to see it."¹⁰⁵. Families with full time housewives were seen as indicators of strong family economics, status and high and healthful living standards for the family. Conversely, popular opinion held that working mothers and their families were to be pitied. It indicated that the husband was not fulfilling his assigned gender role and American ideal of the male as the supporter of the family. A housewife's absence was considered to cause the family to suffer in physical and moral health and wellbeing¹⁰⁶.

However, there were acceptable ways a woman could work outside of the home in the nineteen-fifties and many of them did. The percentage of married

¹⁰² Tyler May, 90.

¹⁰³ Sylvia Lovegren, *Fashionable Foods: Seven Decades of Food Fads*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 181.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Stanton, "A Good Cook Needs an Audience", *House Beautiful*, March 1952, 80.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 207.

women who worked outside the home went up 42% during the decade, with most of the women coming from the middle class¹⁰⁷. Paid employment could reasonably occur either before children were born, once they were in school full time or after they had left home. However, most did not do so to support the day-to-day running of the home and feeding and clothing the family. Rather, they worked to help pay for the new plethora of essential consumer items for the home¹⁰⁸. Since the money was going back into the home their working was seen as acceptable, because it was ultimately going to further support the family, be an exercise of free choice and, most likely, aid in the all important development of leisure in some manner. Leaving the home to involve oneself in civic matters was also acceptable. Becoming involved in local organizations or government was seen to be participating in the benefits of democracy¹⁰⁹.

The only advertisement that directly addressed workingwomen found in the thirty magazines surveyed is the Pacific Contour Sheets ad in the November 1953 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*¹¹⁰. In a series of photographs the ad related how fitted sheets aided Jean Davis, who “works for a New York fashion magazine” in her morning routine. The fitted top and bottom sheets made it impossible for her husband to kick them off in the night, making it easier for Jean to make the bed in the morning as she made breakfast for them both and got herself ready for work. Jean’s working outside the home was acceptable because it was not interfering in

¹⁰⁷ Hartman, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal”, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Tyler May, 156.

¹⁰⁹ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 240.

¹¹⁰ Pacific Contour Sheets Advertisement, November 1953, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 148.

the care of her husband and her home, the couple appeared to not yet have children and her job at a fashion magazine was a distinctly feminine one that encouraged commerce.

Housewife as a Career:

“Marriage is my career, I chose it and now it is up to me to see that I do the job successfully in spite of the stresses and strains of life.”¹¹¹

The majority of housewives considered their homemaking to be a career, and an important one at that¹¹². For women, being a housewife may not have been the choice they would have made, given another option, but they did consider it a job unto itself. Keeping the home and raising children was given career status by the large development of college level home economics courses in the nineteen-fifties and the ability to receive a degree in the field. The families that lived in the trailer camps shown in Life’s “Veterans at College” took turns caring for their children while each parent went to classes and, while women took other classes, it is more than likely that many were enrolled in home making classes to help them in their married lives.

In systematizing the homemaking process to teach it, and being able to rank a student’s ability through grading tests and projects, home economics classes made homemaking into a discipline to learn and a field to master. While many college educators were concerned that women were limiting themselves with such a singular focus, it gave the female students who did participate a sense of

¹¹¹ Tyler May, 26.

¹¹² Ibid, 23.

accomplishment and pride when they married and became housewives¹¹³. Even women who did not participate in home economics courses were able to undertake their new role of housewife with a sense of legitimacy. In marrying and starting a family they had acquired employment and were now able to implement what they had learned in their new position. They had a clear role defined for them and were confident in their ability to fulfill its needs. For women, marriage and homemaking could give them a “sense of responsibility...” or a “...feeling of usefulness...”¹¹⁴.

Housewife as a Market Force

With their important role in assuring familial and national wellbeing, as well as becoming active participants in the securing of income to buy goods, women became a natural target for marketing in the nineteen-fifties¹¹⁵. As keepers of the home they had a deciding vote in buying items for the home as well as the home itself¹¹⁶. Levitt and Sons were in a constant state of tweaking and re-vamping their kitchen plans and appliances to meet the needs of housewives¹¹⁷.

The housewife was now an active, economically viable figure who held a job in her half of the marriage. The consumer-driven economy turned her into another distinct figure that had a right to take part in the mid-century American culture of utilizing commodities and consumption to partake in the “good life”. She became a large target for advertisers to sell objects to that would better her life by easing the

¹¹³ Ibid, 72.

¹¹⁴ Ibid 42.

¹¹⁵ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 265.

¹¹⁶ Hine, 30.

¹¹⁷ Harris, “A Second Suburb”, 11.

burdens of her career through buying things¹¹⁸. As the kitchen was her realm that was where they focused their efforts.

Products were sold with the idea that the manufacturer was trying to meet the special needs of women. The new 1950 International Harvester refrigerators advertised in the April 1950 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* were “...femineered! Women dreamed them...home economists planned them” (see image 36)¹¹⁹. And, as such, featured: “Exclusive! Bottle Opener permanently built-in on the door latch. IH *femineered!* Exclusive! “Egg-o-Mat” Stores 16 eggs; dispenses 1 or 2 at a time. IH *femineered!* Exclusive! “Diffuse-o-Lite” Lights entire interior without glare. IH *femineered!*”. The pretty smock-wearing housewife in the ad smiles delightedly at the prospect of a no glare fridge interior¹²⁰. In *American Home’s* April 1956 issue Curtis Kitchens continued this trend, extolling that they now offered kitchen-remodeling options that were “woman-designed”. “And what is woman-design? It means these cabinets are right for your reach, your way of working. Shelves revolve... slide forward...swing in and out...are adjustable – to put everything right into your hands. Woman [sic] home economists, designers, stylists planned it that way.”¹²¹.

The easing of labor and the creation of leisure was always emphasized, with kitchen manufacturers often claiming that their designs would save the housewife x number of hours either per day or week. With this extra time she could devote more

¹¹⁸ Susan E. Reid, “Our Kitchen in Just as Good’: Soviet Responses to the American Kitchen” in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 83.

¹¹⁹ International Harvester Advertisement, April 1950, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 95.

¹²⁰ Note the refrigerators still have that rounded and low down quality to them from the nineteen-thirties.

¹²¹ Curtis Woodwork Advertisement, April 1956, *American Home*, 50.

of herself to her family and maintain her youth and beauty. Hotpoint and American Kitchens ran dueling ads in the July 1951 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* (see images 37 and 38)¹²². Hotpoint claimed that homemakers (like the apron-wearing one reaching into the oven) would “Save 8 hours Every Week with a Hotpoint All-Electric Kitchen” allowing them to “feel fresher and have extra time for your family as well as the many added duties you’re called on to shoulder these days – because your Hotpoint Kitchen does naturally all of your most tiring, most time consuming tasks *automatically!*”¹²³. Though Hotpoint scored extra points with their incorporation of the advanced technology that would do all the work “*automatically!*”, American Kitchens was the clear winner of the two advertisements¹²⁴. While Hotpoint may have given housewives eight hours of freedom per week, American Kitchens promised “2 hours of Freedom Every Day!”, clocking their kitchen’s creation of leisure time at fourteen hours per week. They were also a little harder hitting in their language. To appeal to housewives on the grounds of family, a little boy shouts the fact that ““Now my Mom has time to play with me!” (the husband is more concerned with the low financing). In terms of saving one’s looks American Kitchens does not mince words and rhetorically asks ““Why put up with youth-robbing kitchen drudgery when you can have America’s most beautifully designed kitchen...!”. American Kitchens embraced the family and youth keeping aspects as the main selling points for kitchen furnishing. The

¹²² Again, at this early point in the nineteen-fifties, both the Hotpoint and the American Kitchen’s maintain a similarity to the appliance styles of the nineteen-thirties. While the cabinets in the Hotpoint kitchen have a greater angularity to them, the counter top still curves around the corner with a shiny steel rim zipping around it. The same steel rim is present in the American Kitchen as well, around each tier of the rounded shelves that make up the end of the counter.

¹²³ Hotpoint Advertisement, July 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 103.

¹²⁴ American Kitchens Advertisement, July 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 77.

following year in *Better Homes and Gardens* June issue they encouraged housewives to send away for free information on their products. The housewife in the ad finally succumbed to mailing her request “the day Jeff said, ‘Aw Jimmy’s mother is more fun than *you* are!’ ...And I remember too how right Jeff was – Jimmy’s mother did have more time to have fun with Jimmy – time to keep herself looking young and fresh. While I, it seemed, was always stuck in that old work trap kitchen of mine....”¹²⁵.

A positive aspect of the focus on homemaker as consumer was the realization and validation that housework was *work*. While the advertisements are amusingly lacking in subtlety they acknowledge the sheer physical effort that goes into caring for the home and family. Housework took time away from, and a toll on, the housewife. Her job entailed a real amount of physical labor that could be eased by innovation and automation along with the rest of American labor. And while a low glare refrigerator light may not have been the challenge that most needed to be solved, manufacturers created kitchen innovations that *did* ease some actual burdens and problems. A double page Norge advertisement from *Better Homes and Gardens* in April of 1950 shows their newly innovated refrigerators and ranges (see image 39)¹²⁶. “The New Norge Golden ‘50 Refrigerator with exclusive Self-D-Froster system defrosts while you sleep!” And saved the homemaker from the time and mess it used to take to empty the refrigerator, defrost the freezer and continually empty out an overflowing drip tray throughout the course of a day¹²⁷.

¹²⁵ American Kitchens Advertisement, June 1952, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 123.

¹²⁶ Norge Advertisement, April 1950, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 106.

¹²⁷ Again, both the 1950 Norge stove and refrigerator are created as heavy, rounded masses.

That the new Norge ovens featured more accurate and even heating would help eliminate overcooked food disasters; which can be, to a certain extent, “Heartbreak for Any Woman!”.

Housewife as Accessory:

Through a comparison of the image of women in the early advertisements of the decade to images of them in later advertisements a clear change can be seen in the view of the housewife’s role. In 1950 the women beside International Harvester’s “femineered” refrigerator and by Norge’s new appliance offerings appear fashionable yet still capable of completing housework. A certain amount of care in appearance is understandable as housewives were, in fact, doing a job. They were not lounging at home doing nothing but they were working hard to keep the family together. International Harvester and Norge each designed their appliances and geared their advertising to aiding the housewife in her valuable work.

Frigidaire’s 1957 ad from *Better Homes and Gardens*’ January issue presents a one hundred and eighty degree change in the image of the nineteen-fifties housewife (see image 40)¹²⁸. Apron and sensible, yet stylish, clothes to work in have been cast aside. This housewife, next to the pink refrigerator, is dressed in a yellow party dress with matching yellow kitten heels and a crown of flowers on her head. Her labor has been eliminated to the point that that she can dress in this manner. Frigidaire’s ad sells their new refrigerator to women who should be equally at ease at this point in the decade. The most notable labor saving selling point that the new

¹²⁸ Frigidaire Advertisement, January 1957, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 60.

leisured homemakers need to make life even simpler for them is Frigidaire's new "Ice-Ejector" which "delivers 27 cubes in 4 seconds flat."

At this later point in the decade we can see that the rounded, bulging and heavy form that refrigerators took in the early nineteen-fifties has been replaced. The expanses of the refrigerator are now flat, the corners come to points and there is a greater use of steel, giving the mass a sense of lightness and modern innovation. Frigidaire was the company that first came out with this new style for appliances. Labeled "The Sheer Look", Frigidaire used it on their washers, dryers, stoves and refrigerators (see image 41). "Every line is straight, every corner is square, the whole look is sheer – to bring the beauty of modern simplicity..."¹²⁹. "The Sheer Look" moved the kitchen space into even closer alignment with the designs of the Bauhaus and the Frankfurt kitchens but the continued application of color kept the space distinctly American¹³⁰. The visual effect of the sharply angled appliances in an array of colors was reflective of the abstract works of Josef Albers, namely the works from his series *Homage to the Square* (see images 42 and 43). A former student and faculty member of the Bauhaus, Albers came to America in 1933 and became head of the Department of Design at Yale in 1950. From 1950 to 1976 Albers created hundreds of images of squares stacked on top of each other in a range of colors to study how colors interacted with one another and to allow viewers to experience that interaction.

¹²⁹ Frigidaire Advertisement. January, 1957, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 80.

¹³⁰ It is worth noting that at this late date in the decade the colors used for appliances are beginning to move beyond the realm of bright pastels. Image 41 features the baby pinks and sunshine yellow of the earlier part of the decade along with a boldly black refrigerator.

Tappan advertisements followed this change in the presentation of the housewife as well. A 1953 ad in the March issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* places a small image of a woman in an apron standing next to the featured stoves and smiling (see image 44). The ad's copy focuses on how Tappan produces a range of items that will meet every home's budget and space. The company's main image of the homemaker in its ad in the April 1958 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* is a total change from the woman used five years earlier (see image 45)¹³¹. Dressed in a full skirted, sleeveless shimmering blue cocktail dress, she barely stands in her kitchen space. Which is the point of the ad's text, that a Gold Ribbon Tappan is the key to kitchen freedom. Stylishly "decorated with fleur-de-lis" the oven is "electric and fully automatic – starts, cooks complete meals, turns off without your being anywhere near...".

Stylistically the ad conforms to the tastes and trends that *House Beautiful* set out in 1952. The homemaker and the advertised oven and range are placed in a richly textured brick room. The dress of the homemaker matches the aqua blue of the walls. In the background an abstract work of art is hung on the wall. The bright steel of the oven and cook top connotes futuristic developments while the copper spoons hanging on the wall reference more antiquated kitchen spaces.

The later Tappan ad is illustrative of the fictive image that was created for the kitchen and the housewife in the later part of the decade. Believing that their innovations could do anything, manufactures and advertisers insisted that the kitchen was now work-free. Speed cook settings, timers, frozen food and boxed

¹³¹ Tappan Advertisement, April 1958, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 146.

mixes were all supposed to make for carefree kitchens, meals and housewives. But kitchens and meals can never be carefree; no matter how innovative the oven and the number of push-buttons it has, it cannot drive to the store, buy and prepare ingredients and serve and clean up after a meal.

Even with their Gold Ribbon Tappans and Frigidaire Ice-Ejectors and Norge Self – D- Froster systems women still had a great amount of work to do in the kitchen. More appliances did not actually equal more leisure time for housewives. The work that they were doing may have been less laborious and they were able to complete more tasks for each hour that they worked but their tasks were still numerous and took up all of their time¹³². The burden of housework was added to, with the pressure that one should be able to be not just presentable, but glamorous at all times¹³³. The view of the housewife as a leisured beauty crept into popular conscious and opinion through these advertisements.

In utilizing advertisements such as these, manufacturers helped to negate the very career that they had originally celebrated and embraced as a way to market their items. They destabilized the role of the housewife in popular culture. From the housewives point of view they were expected to maintain their health and beauty as well as their family at all times. Now, since appliances were doing all the work for them, they had no reason to ever have the home not in top condition and take perfect care of the family while always looking cocktail party ready themselves¹³⁴. These images and ideals also impacted how husbands viewed their wives' roles and

¹³² Schwartz Cowan, 201.

¹³³Hine, 30.

¹³⁴ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*, 253.

workloads. Early advertisements sold husbands on kitchen remodeling by claiming to be “wife savers” and articles focused on home construction projects that men could undertake to help keep their wife’s kitchen in working order. But with these new claims and images the view of how much work a wife actually did changed. Whereas before she had been considered an as hard-working half of the couple as himself she now came in line with the image that appeared in an 1957 issue of *Electrical Merchandising* of a woman relaxing on a chaise lounge in her kitchen, smoking and consuming bonbons while the kitchen does the work for her (see image 46)¹³⁵. Images like these, from the end of the decade, capture the changes that were beginning to foment in the minds of women¹³⁶. While they had once been willing to accept their role as keepers of the home, as necessary to family and national wellbeing, the continued acceptance of this stance was becoming insupportable. The unrealistic ideals and loss of respect they were now facing combined with their increasing stressors of lack of mental stimulation and power in their own lives and contributed to their eventual exodus from the kitchen and the home in later decades¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Miner, 253.

¹³⁶ Tyler May, 37.

¹³⁷ Marling, 255.

NEW 1950 INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER REFRIGERATORS

... they're

femineered!

Outside

Exclusive! Superbly simple "Shadowline" styling; tapered, full length door—*femineered* for graceful, compact beauty. No gadgets, no dust-catchers—easy to clean, splendid to see!



**WOMEN DREAMED THEM ...
HOME ECONOMISTS PLANNED THEM**

Inside

Your dream come true! Mighty 9.2 cu. ft. model. Features include "Pantry-Door," cold from top to bottom, "Diffuse-O-Lite," 50-lb. freezer locker, full width and extra crisper. IH made—to work for you.



SIX MODELS—SIX SIZES—FOR FAMILIES OF 2 TO 10

Six different models, and each so perfect you'll find it hard to choose! See them all—from 7.4 to 9.5 cu. ft. capacity. Let your IH dealer show you all the features including porcelain enameled interiors... "Shadowline" full-length doors. All models have the bottle opener... the "Tight-Wad" unit—5-year warranty permanently attached to the cabinet... IH exclusives!

Tune in James Melton and "Harvest of Stars," NBC, Sunday Afternoons

**BIGGEST
LITTLE REFRIGERATOR**
You ever saw

Model H-74—only 25 inches wide—yet way over 7 cu. ft. capacity! IH features include shelves you can shift to suit yourselves 24 different ways! Favored for tiny kitchens—tiny budgets, too—for it's *femineered* for size, space, service!



... EVERY FEATURE HAS A FUNCTION



EXCLUSIVE! BOTTLE-OPENER Permanently built-in on the door latch. IH *femineered!*
EXCLUSIVE! "EGG-O-MAT" Stores 16 eggs; dispenses 1 or 2 at a time. IH *femineered!*
EXCLUSIVE! "DIFFUSE-O-LITE" Lights entire interior without glare. IH *femineered!*

IH
INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER

International Harvester Also Builds McCormick Farm Equipment and Farmall Tractors... Motor Trucks... Industrial Power... International Harvester Company, 180 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Illinois

Image 36: International Harvester Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1950, 95.

Save 8 Hours Every Week With A

Hotpoint All-Electric Kitchen



Gain Extra Time For All Your Extra Duties!

YOU'LL discover wonderful new freedom in a magic Hotpoint All-Electric Kitchen... find that it actually saves you over an hour every day, a full working day every single week! You'll feel fresher and have extra time for your family as well as the many added duties you're called on to shoulder these days—because your Hotpoint Kitchen does nearly all of your most tiring, most time-consuming tasks *automatically!*

• • • Just set the controls and your Hotpoint Pushbutton Range cooks dinner while you're out shopping!... Twist a dial and your Hotpoint Electric Dishwasher washes, rinses and dries the dishes!... Turn on the water and food waste magically disappears through your Hotpoint Disposal!... Special work-saving cabinet arrangements put foods and utensils right at your finger tip!... And you need never waste time defrosting the roomy refrigerator section of your big Hotpoint combination Refrigerator-Freezer!

• • • A Hotpoint All-Electric Kitchen is a real necessity these busy days. And you can easily own one—on convenient monthly terms if you wish. Send today for new illustrated planning book, "Your Next Kitchen." Mail 15c (no stamps) to Hotpoint, Inc., Kitchen & Laundry Planning Dept., 5650 W. Taylor St., Chicago 44, or see your Hotpoint dealer.

For dealer's name, see your classified phone book.

Everybody's Pointing To

Hotpoint

Quality Appliances
A General Electric Affiliate

WORLD'S MOST CONVENIENT REFRIGERATOR!
• • • Out front with everything—that's the new 1951 Hotpoint "Super-Stor" Refrigerator! 72% of all storage space is in finger-up reach! Your choice of single-door models or 2-door combination Refrigerator-Freezers.

Look To Hotpoint For The Finest... **FIRST!**

RANGES • REFRIGERATORS • DISHWASHERS • DISPOSALS • WATER HEATERS • FOOD FREEZERS • AUTOMATIC WASHERS • CLOTHES DRYERS • ROTARY IRONERS • CABINETS

Image 37: Hotpoint Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, July 1951, 103.

My **AMERICAN KITCHEN** Gives Me 2 Hours of Freedom Every Day!




NOW MY MOM HAS TIME TO PLAY WITH ME!



AND IT ONLY COST A FEW DOLLARS A MONTH ON EASY NEW FHA TERMS



Why put up with youth-robbing kitchen drudgery when you can have America's most beautifully designed kitchen—now—for only a few dollars a month. Ask your dealer about the easy FHA terms!

Only American Kitchens Have All These Work-Saving Features!


- Lifetime vinyl worksurfaces in 5 beautiful colors.
- Store-house storage space—at fingertip level.
- Easiest to clean kitchen in America—rounded drawer interiors wipe out like a bowl—no handles to collect dirt.

American KITCHENS
"SAVE 1000 STEPS A DAY"

American Central Division  Connersville, Indiana

Image 38: American Kitchens Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, July 1951, 77.

WHAT A SLOPPY JOB!



YOU'VE NEVER SO FROST AGAIN. The new Self-D-Froster system of defrosting on the door of the Norge Golden '50 Refrigerator is the convenience of the Norge Golden '50 Refrigerator. You'll never have to defrost again on your door.


YOU'VE NEVER SO BAKED AGAIN. The new Norge Electric Range with Blended-Heat Oven is the convenience of the Norge Electric Range. You'll never have to bake again on your stove.

ONLY NORGE SOLVES BOTH PROBLEMS!

The New NORGE Golden '50 Refrigerator With Exclusive SELF-D-FROSTER System Defrosts While You Sleep!

The New NORGE Electric Range With BLENDED-HEAT OVEN Makes You a Baking Expert!

HEARTBREAK FOR ANY WOMAN!




WOMEN MAKE THREE SPECIAL NORGE FEATURES that get up to 100 percent out of the refrigerator, electric range, and oven. You can get a whole lot of the new Norge.

Self-D-Froster System defrosts door and food when you go to bed. You'll never have to defrost again on your door. You'll never have to defrost again on your door.

Blended-Heat Oven makes every recipe a success. You'll never have to bake again on your stove. You'll never have to bake again on your stove.

Big, clear picture window lets you look inside without lifting the lid. You'll never have to lift the lid to see what's cooking. You'll never have to lift the lid to see what's cooking.

See the features of America's finest home appliances.



SEE THE FEATURES OF AMERICA'S FINEST HOME APPLIANCES

SEE THE FEATURES OF AMERICA'S FINEST HOME APPLIANCES




Image 39: Norge Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1950, 106.

Here's the handiest Sheer Look Beauty FRIGIDAIRE has ever made!



Of course, it has all the magic of Sheer Look styling to make your old kitchen look radiantly new now—and keep you in style for the future. And it has color, too—because Frigidaire now is selling off its color appliances at no extra charge over white.

But above all is the buppy fact that here's the handiest food freezer-refrigerator ever to speed your meal-getting routine!

—Two main shelves—with a special big-bottle shelf to boot—roll out, all the way. Every square inch of every corner is usable—with no gadgets to trip your fingers—much more shelf area, model for model, than most other makes.

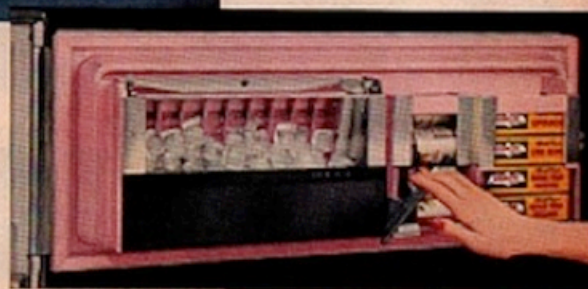
—The ingenious Plus-A-Door, with interchangeable containers and movable shelves, that lets you be the boss on door storage.

—The freezer section—a real zero-cold freezer—holds 54 pounds—and door dispensers drop cans and packages right into your fingers.

—There are two big Hydrators—a giant Meat Tender (all three porcelain enamel finished), and the finest automatic defrosting system ever invented for the refrigerator section.

—Lady, this is it!—and you'd better act fast. See your Frigidaire dealer—he'll show you it's all true! And the price was NEVER so right!

Model shown is Mayfair Pink—also available in Sherwood Green, Stafford Yellow and the new fashion-wise Charcoal Grey, the color that goes with everything.



Frigidaire Ice-Ejector delivers 27 cubes in 4 seconds flat!

Just pull a lever and the wonderful Frigidaire Ice-Ejector loses the cubes—you don't touch them—keeps them in never-stick cold-stored in a removable bin you can take anywhere!



Look for your Frigidaire Dealer's name in the Yellow Pages of your Classified Telephone Directory under the heading "Electric Appliances."

Frigidaire—Built and Backed by General Motors

'57 FRIGIDAIRE

AMERICA'S HANDIEST REFRIGERATORS



Image 40: Frigidaire Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, January 1957, 60.

FRIGIDAIRE PRESENTS THE SHEER LOOK
The most exciting change that ever came into your Kitchen!

Look for the SHEER LOOK

'57 FRIGIDAIRE APPLIANCES

Frigidaire - Built and Backed by General Motors

It's so all-out stunning you can't believe your eyes. But it's here—the Sheer Look! A whole new design idea that makes a dream kitchen come true. On Frigidaire Refrigerators, Ranges, and Laundry Appliances for 1957, every line is straight, every corner is square, the whole look is sheer—to bring the beauty of modern simplicity into present kitchens, or kitchens of the home-you-hope-to-build. Here, surely, is styling so right that it sets the trend and pattern of tomorrow. Here, too, are the most mechanically perfect appliances ever built—all new, with the best in engineering from both Frigidaire and General Motors. You'll see a refrigerator that opens any door, for new surprises. You'll see interiors that sing in colors, like fashion-fair Chateau. You'll see a refrigerator with a door that also zips out ice at the touch. You'll see the final word in magic ranges—with "Thinking Face" that practically do your cooking for you. You'll see a new laundry pair that give you a storable saving every week.

Look for the Sheer Look in the Yellow Pages of your Classified Telephone Directory under "Electric Appliances."

Image 41: Frigidaire Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, January 1957, 80.

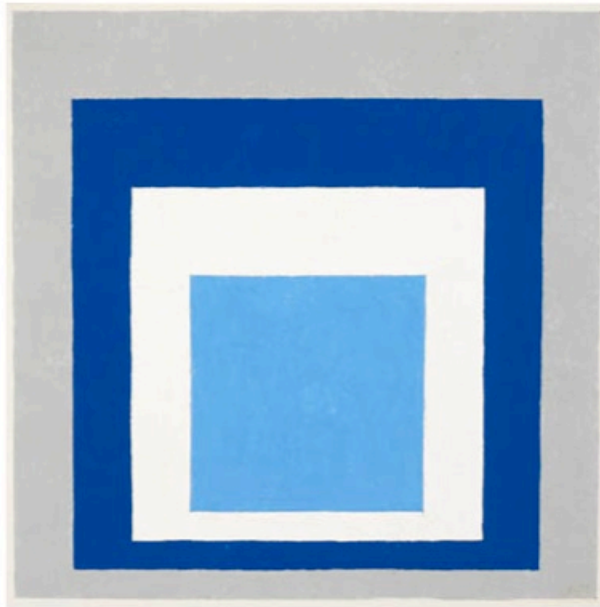


Image 42: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Blue, White, Gray*, 1950, oil on masonite, 28 (h) x 28 (w) cm. Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Connecticut. Source: <http://www.albersfoundation.org/Albers.php?inc=Galleries&g=i560>

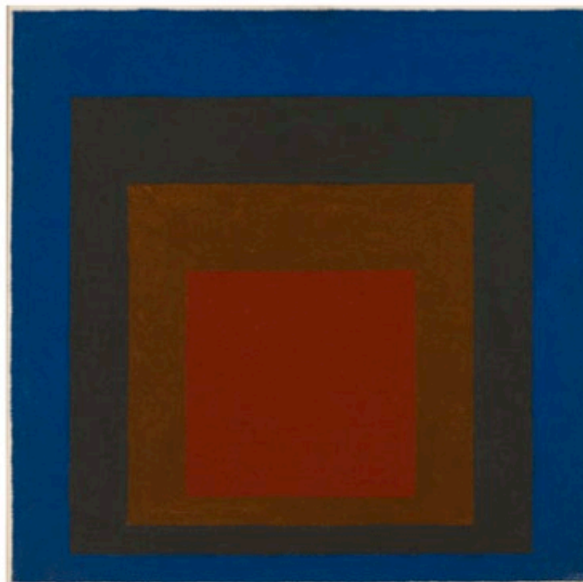


Image 43: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Night Shades*, 1957, oil on masonite, 45 (h) x 45 (w) cm. Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Connecticut. Source: <http://www.albersfoundation.org/Albers.php?inc=Galleries&g=i810>

**there's a TAPPAN
to fit your budget...
to fit your kitchen**

Whatever you're looking for . . . a range to fit your kitchen or your budget . . . there's a Tappan that's "just right". For example, these two new Tappan beauties:

BIG RANGE FOR SMALL SPACES? The new Holiday by Tappan is the range for you. Only 30 inches wide—with the biggest oven you have ever seen. Holiday—Tappan's big range for compact kitchens.



BIG SPACE—LOW BUDGET? Then you want the new 36 inch Tappan Meadowbrook. Almost as big as the biggest. Latest in styling. The Meadowbrook is a dream—the moderate price a reality.

**TAKE A MOMENT TO COMPARE . . .
AND YOU'LL TAKE TAPPAN**

Compare and you'll take Tappan . . . the range designed with you in mind. Finest of all is the famous Super Sixty Tappan that offers you all these exclusive features . . .



- LIFT-OFF OVEN DOOR
- PRES-TOE BROILER
- CHROME LINED OVEN
- CRISP CHEST
- TEL-U-SET
- VISUALITE OVEN

Take a moment and see your Tappan dealer today. Let him show you the Tappan that is "just for you". Tappan models are made for city gas, Philgas and other LP (bottled) gases. For complete catalog, write The Tappan Stove Co., Dept. B-33, Mansfield, Ohio. In Canada, John Inglis, Ltd., Toronto.

TAPPAN
GAS RANGE



Image 44: Tappan Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, March 1953, 149.



HOW PROUD YOU'LL BE OF YOUR GOLD RIBBON **TAPPAN**

Who wouldn't be proud! Look at Tappan's incredibly beautiful new styling. Eye-level controls are set in a panel of illuminated glass, decorated with fleur-de-lis. Wide-vision Visualite window gives you an inside view of the gleaming chrome-lined oven which bakes better

and cleans easier. It's electric and fully automatic—starts, cooks complete meals, turns off without your being anywhere near. High broiler lets you bake and broil at the same time. Famous Tappan electric surface units are set in quick-cleaning stainless steel counter panel.



TAPPAN'S FABULOUS ELECTRONIC—cuts cooking time 90%! Eggs cook in 22 seconds, potatoes in 4 minutes, roasts in 30 minutes. Browns perfectly.



TAPPAN'S ALL-NEW HOLIDAY RANGE—just 30 inches wide. Giant chrome-lined oven cooks a full meal for up to 30 people. Power-driven rotisserie, 7-heat surface units.



POWER-DRIVEN ROTISSERIE barbecues chicken, shish-kabob, roasts, in their own juices. Saves you broiling. Easily removed for quick cleaning.



TAPPAN SET-'N-FORGET automatic surface unit ends pot-watching and scorching. Food can't burn even if you forget.



ENTIRE DOOR LIFTS OFF for easier cleaning. Even the door seal can be easily removed, washed, put back.

Nothing cooks like a
TAPPAN

Image 45: Tappan Advertisement. Source: *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1958, 146.

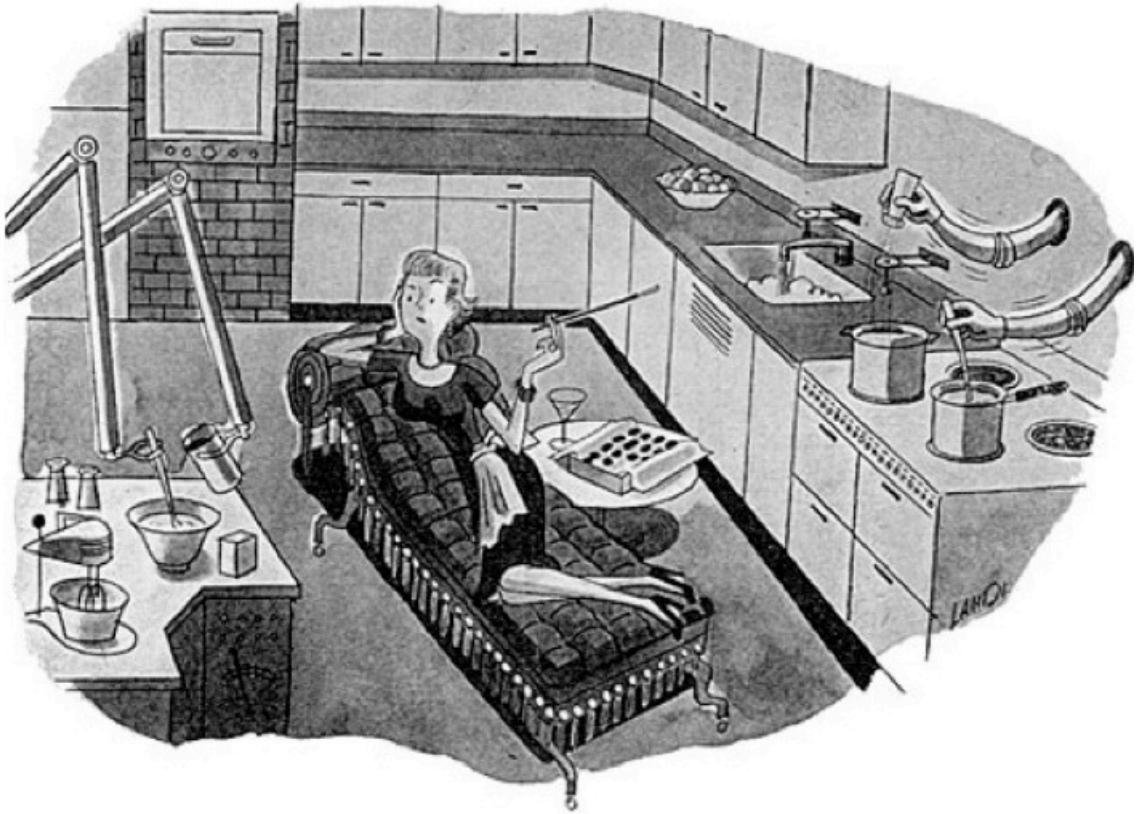


Image 46: Illustration from *Electrical Merchandising*, 1957. Source: Curtis Miner. "Pink Kitchens for Little Boxes" in *Second Suburb*, ed. Diane Harris (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010) fig. 9.3.

Chapter Five: The Kitchen and the Cold War

A manifestation of how the kitchen functioned as a practical fetish of American life occurred on the global stage at the end of the decade, in 1959, during the American National Exhibition in Moscow. While Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and American Vice President Richard Nixon toured the exhibition on the official opening day in July they engaged in an impromptu heated exchange on the ideologies of communism versus capitalism. This forty-five minute exchange occurred while standing in the kitchen of a model ranch home imported from America to Moscow for the exhibition, giving the exchange the moniker of The Kitchen Debate¹³⁸. Rather than debating the merits and downfalls of each other's governmental systems in the terms of military or scientific developments, the two spoke in terms of the very items and individuals that filled the pages of the magazines that have been reviewed throughout this thesis: stoves, refrigerators and housewives¹³⁹. Within both the American National Exhibition, and Nixon and Khrushchev's Kitchen Debate, the kitchen, its appliances and the housewife were all used as physical emblems of mid-century American cultural ideals of living a modern life devoted to free choice and leisure.

The American National Exhibition in Moscow was the American half of an exchange of cultural exhibitions between the US and the USSR. The agreement to the exchanges came about after Khrushchev surprisingly announced a desire for greater trade and cultural exchange between the two nations while being interviewed on

¹³⁸ Massy and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 198.

¹³⁹ Tyler May, 10.

CBS's *Face the Nation* in June of 1957¹⁴⁰. By late 1958 it had been agreed that each nation would stage an exhibition on the other's soil that would focus on the "development of each of its science, technology and culture."¹⁴¹ The Soviet exhibition took place in the New York Coliseum convention center while the Americans built their exhibition space from the ground up outside of Moscow, in Sokolniki Park.

American Goals for the Exhibition

"Nothing anybody will ever say about free enterprise will have the impact of what the average Russian will see when he walks through the average American's home."

Herbert Sadkin, All-State Properties¹⁴²

What Khrushchev's goal was in sparking the movement to these reciprocal exhibitions is still not clear. One theory is that it was to shore up internal support for the production of consumer goods in the USSR by showing Soviet citizens a wealth of American goods¹⁴³. Another is that the whole idea of exchanges was done in order to get a close-hand look at American technological innovations¹⁴⁴. The American goals for their exhibition in Moscow are, however, quite clear. In an interview with the *New York Herald Tribune* in March of 1959 exhibition planner George Nelson was quoted as saying "primarily, we want to make a simple sincere statement about

¹⁴⁰ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961*, (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1997), 151.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 161.

¹⁴² Cristina Carbone, "Staging the Kitchen Debate: How Splitnik Got Normalized in the United States", in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 65.

¹⁴³ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 165.

¹⁴⁴ Massy and Morgan, , 169.

American life.”¹⁴⁵. While there was truth to that statement, it was only part of the actual goal. The larger goal of the American government was to use that “sincere statement” as a propaganda tool to undermine communism from within the USSR. A declassified document titled “Secret Basic Policy Guidance for the US Exhibition in Moscow in 1959” stated that while the public objective was to “increase understanding of the people of the Soviet Union of the American people and American life”, that goal should be achieved by “placing particular emphasis on American precepts, practices and concepts which might contribute to existing pressures tending in the long run toward a reorientation of the Soviet system in the direction of greater freedom” ¹⁴⁶.

To meet the public and classified goals of the exhibition it was decided to gear the entire event towards presenting the everyday goods of American life. It was believed that this method would illustrate how “Freedom of choice and expression, and the unimpeded flow of diverse goods and ideas [are] the sources of American cultural and economic achievement” as well as be the most appealing and readily understandable to the average Soviet visitor to the exhibition¹⁴⁷. The American exhibit was designed to awe the Soviets with the variety of items and choices (and, therefore, freedom) that Americans enjoyed in everyday life and compel the communist citizens to embrace capitalism.

To create and oversee the exhibition space the American government tapped George Nelson and his firm. Nelson in turn invited Charles and Ray Eames to help

¹⁴⁵ Massy and Morgan, 167.

¹⁴⁶ Carbone, “Staging the Kitchen Debate”, 62.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

with the physical development of the grounds at Sokolniki Park¹⁴⁸. Their ultimate plan for the exhibition space was to divide it into two main buildings surrounded by smaller kiosks, stages and booths¹⁴⁹. The first building that Soviet visitors would enter was a geodesic dome created by Buckminster Fuller. Inside of the dome were seven movie theater sized screens. Simultaneously on each screen a film the Eames' and their team had created of images of a week in the life of a typical American suburban family continuously played¹⁵⁰. On exiting the dome, visitors would enter into the Jungle Gym. A sprawling multi-level glass walled building divided into cube-like rooms, the Jungle Gym housed the plethora of consumer items (many displayed as they would have been found in America, in mock rooms, grocery stores and department stores) as well as demonstration areas¹⁵¹. The building was filled to bursting with models, demonstrations and installations packed with the consumer goods that America had to offer: clothing, shoes, pots, pans, gardening tools etc. Anything that could be bought in America was put on display in multiple models and colors so that the Soviets could see just what they were missing. The wealth of goods were provided directly by the business community, who President Eisenhower had personally courted and convinced to offer samples of items to supply the exhibits and (in many cases) pay the freight cost of shipping the goods to Moscow as well¹⁵². While the Eames' focused their attention on the creation of their film, Nelson and his firm concentrated on the layout and set-up of the Jungle Gym

¹⁴⁸ Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 250.

¹⁴⁹ The exhibition area took up the space of approximately two city blocks. (Kreen, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit*, 156.)

¹⁵⁰ Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front* 149.

¹⁵¹ Masey and Morgan, 179.

¹⁵² Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 169.

and its contents, which Nelson dismissively referred to as “the stuff”¹⁵³. It was behind the Jungle Gym that the model home was located.

The focus of the American National Exhibition was in direct contrast to what the Soviets ultimately did in New York. While the Soviets did include displays and information of everyday life and culture in the USSR, most of their exhibition was devoted to emphasizing their technological advancements in space exploration, weaponry and heavy industrial production¹⁵⁴. To impress westerners with their technological prowess they prominently featured “...three Sputnik satellites, a model rocket and a working model of an iron and steel making complex among ten thousand exhibits”¹⁵⁵.

Kitchens at the Exhibition

Placed amongst the displays of goods, the fashion shows, the auto exhibits, the Helena Rubenstein makeover kiosk and the young Russian-speaking American guides acting as ambassadors of American life, were four different kitchens in different venues throughout the exhibition. Three of the kitchens were located in the Jungle Gym. General Foods and Bird’s Eye sponsored the demonstration kitchen (see image 47)¹⁵⁶. Russian-speaking American home economists staffed the kitchen and prepared sample food for visitors using the latest in canned goods, frozen foods and boxed mixes for the astounded audiences to taste¹⁵⁷. RCA-Whirlpool had a “Miracle

¹⁵³ Masey and Morgan, 179.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 246.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 217.

¹⁵⁷ Castillo, 142.

Kitchen” that featured space age innovations such as a dishwasher that rolled on a track to the table, a free-ranging vacuum cleaner that happily whirled about the floor with a mind of its own and cabinets that raised and lowered themselves at the touch of a button (see image 48). Not every feature in the Miracle Kitchen was truly functional but the installed guides acted as if they were¹⁵⁸.

The model urban apartment of an imaginary doctor’s family featured an efficient and up-to-date space in which Soviets could envision the urban life of an upper middle-class American (see image 49). The model apartment was one of the areas in the Jungle Gym that Nelson enthusiastically gave his personal attention to¹⁵⁹. The apartment was furnished with the latest creations by Herman Miller, Frances Knoll, Paul McCobb and Edward Wormley. These top-of-the-line furnishings were seen as reasonable additions as it was assumed that the fictional family that lived there had, according to Nelson, “pretty sophisticated tastes and a pretty good income”. In fact, the fictional family had been allotted a yearly income of \$12,000, twice the national average in 1959¹⁶⁰. Seemingly a pet-project of Nelson, the model apartment received little press focus from either the Soviets or the Americans.

According to the results of voting booths placed throughout the grounds where visitors were asked to rank their favorite exhibits, the most popular kitchen at the exhibition was the one in the model home where Nixon and Khrushchev

¹⁵⁸Ibid, 166.

¹⁵⁹Ibid, 153.

¹⁶⁰Ibid, 154.

would butt heads on opening day¹⁶¹. The kitchen was set in a six-room ranch style home with the decade's typical open floor plan, like the ones found in suburbs all over America. Nelson related that the home was meant to present a "less advanced taste"¹⁶². Clearly not considering the model home to have the same cachet as the model apartment Nelson had little to do with the furnishing or design of the home. This particular model (the futuristic sounding X-61) had been donated by the Long Island builder All-State properties and was exactly like the ones that the company built in New York, Florida and Kentucky (see image 50). For the exhibition it was fashioned as belonging to a fictional family of four, the Browns¹⁶³. To accommodate the large crowds of Soviet visitors, designer Raymond Loewy and architect Andrew Geller were in charge of splitting the home down the center and inserting a ten-foot wide walkway down the middle¹⁶⁴. This earned the home the nickname of "Splitnik"¹⁶⁵.

Despite this necessary yet intrusive addition, the home was situated in such a way as to try and give visitors an accurate experience of American suburban life. As visitors approached the home they had to pass a mock curb and driveway where a Studebaker Lark and an AMC Rambler were parked¹⁶⁶. The interior of the home had been furnished by items all available for purchase through Macy's, though it was furnished at a budget of \$5,000; almost half of the yearly income of a middle class

¹⁶¹ Massy and Morgan, 212.

¹⁶² Castillo, 154.

¹⁶³ Massy and Morgan, 66.

¹⁶⁴ Justin Davidson, "The Kitchen Debate's Actual Kitchen", *nymag.com*, <http://nymag.com/realestate/features/commack-moscow-2011-5/>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Carbone, 68.

family¹⁶⁷. The “Brown’s” kitchen was a bright yellow and white affair designed by General Electric (see image 51 and 52). It was stocked with appliances that would have been included back home in model X-61: “a built-in oven, countertop cooking unit, dishwasher, waste disposal, combination washer dryer, water heater and combination refrigerator freezer”¹⁶⁸. It was in this kitchen and through these items that the exhibition sought to expose Soviet visitors to a slice of daily American life. It was also in this kitchen that Vice President Richard Nixon would use the American kitchen, appliances and housewife to articulate to Premier Khrushchev the ideals of mid-century American culture¹⁶⁹.

Kitchen as Culture

Nixon: “I want to show you this kitchen...”

Khrushchev: “You Americans think the Russian people will be astonished to see such these things...”

Nixon and Khrushchev on entering the “Splitnik”¹⁷⁰

Khrushchev seemed to be in an especially combative mood when he and Nixon toured the exhibition on opening day. Never an easygoing man, his ire had, most likely, been raised only hours earlier by the actions of the US Congress. Nixon’s departure from Washington DC to Moscow had coincided with Congress passing the “Captive Nations Resolution”. Under the resolution the President was called on to issue a week of prayer for all those who lived “under communist tyranny.”¹⁷¹. His

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Carbone, 71.

¹⁶⁹ Colomina, 244.

¹⁷⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Kitchen Debate Transcript*. [foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov)

http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/16/1959-07-24.pdf

¹⁷¹ Marling, 272.

probable irritation at this led to almost anything and everything that Nixon pointed out to Khrushchev in the exhibition being met with disdain for the item and a condemnation for the system that allowed its creation and consumption.

When they entered the “Splitnik” his mood was no better (see image 53). The dishwasher was dismissed because the Soviets already had “such things”¹⁷². The home may have been available to the average laborer but it would not last more than twenty years, whereas the Soviets “...build firmly. We build for our children and our grandchildren”. Appliances that were designed to ease the housewife’s work were meaningless to him, as “Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism.”. Nixon fired back at Khrushchev’s dismissals, equally invested in winning the upper hand in this sudden debate¹⁷³.

Khrushchev was right when he said that the Americans wanted the Soviets to be “astonished” by what was in the model home, and by extension the entire exhibition. The items that were in each installation and model were picked because they were emblematic of the tenets of American life, the life towards which the Americans were trying to compel Soviet citizens. In his responses to Khrushchev’s barbs Nixon had to reveal how the items of daily American life stood for the American ideals. The home that Khrushchev dismissed as being poorly built would last longer than twenty years but that was no reason anyone would live there that

¹⁷² This was untrue. Soviet kitchens that appeared in exhibitions and world’s fairs were often inflated presentations of the kind of homes and appliances that everyday Soviets had access to. (Masey and Morgan, 149.)

¹⁷³ History is divided on whether or not the Kitchen Debate was a chance occurrence or, if Nixon and his staff planned it. (Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann “Kitchens as Technology and Politics: An Introduction” in *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 8.)

long. Americans embraced the right to live the most modern life available: “after twenty years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen...the American system is designed to take advantage of new innovations and new techniques.”

Nixon deflected the statement that easing labor for women was somehow exclusive to capitalism. Americans were so committed to living the life of leisure for everyone that it was anyone who thought differently that was in the minority. He tried to make Khrushchev and communism seem out of touch in stating that the desire to ease women’s labor “is universal”. And, as to Khrushchev’s assertion that in Russia everyone was entitled to a house and was given one, the more important point for Americans was the ability to pick one’s own home, to exercise free choice from a wide range of options: “Diversity, the right to choose, the fact that we have 1,000 builders building 1,000 different homes is the most important thing...we don’t have one decision made at the top by one government official. This is the difference.”

For Khrushchev, everything about the model home and its kitchen was a trapping of “wretched excess and bourgeois trivia”¹⁷⁴. For Nixon, everything about the model home and its kitchen stood for the best parts of capitalism, democracy and America all rolled into one room: the ability of the American family to utilize the latest advances to live a leisurely life of their choice¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁴ Marling, 243.

¹⁷⁵ Following the Kitchen Debate the model home became a topic of popular conversation in the USSR and America. Russian newspapers lambasted the model home as a complete falsehood. From the American standpoint, the home was seen as an emblem of American triumph.. Following the opening of the exhibition and the Kitchen Debate, Macy’s sponsored the creation of replicas of Splitnik to be displayed in different cities in America; so that Americans could tour first-hand what had so shocked the Soviets. (Carbone, “Staging the Kitchen Debate”, 74.)

Conclusion:

It is fortunate that images and records exist of the American National Exhibition in Moscow and of the Kitchen Debate. Both help in creating an acid test in which to determine if the ideals of mid-twentieth century American culture that seem to be revealed in the articles and advertisements of the home magazines of the decade are correct. However, not all objects have such events or exchanges in which they play such a prominent role. But this should not exclude them from being the focus of academic study. My decision to study the kitchen space of the nineteen-fifties through antique magazines was ultimately due to my personal interest in both, not because there were two significant historical events tied to it that could act as verification. Though I do include them and feel they add support to my interpretations I would rather they had not occurred so I did not have to factor them in. They act as an unfortunate safety net that most studies of material culture cannot provide. This has the potential to lead to objects being rejected as topics of study; which should not be the case. With careful consideration most objects of everyday life can be read as records. They can record the time and place of their immediate creation and use as well as have an afterlife in which they can take on all new meanings. It is my hope that this thesis will provide support to the use of material culture as both a topic and tool of study.



Image 47: The General Foods-Bird's Eye Demonstration Kitchen. Source: Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations* (Baden: Lars Mueller Publications, 2008), 217.



Image 48: The RCA-Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen. Source: Beatriz Colomina, "Enclosed by Images: Architecture in the Postsplitnik Age", *Architecture Norway*, <http://www.architecturenorway.no/questions/histories/colomina-images/>



Image 49: The Model Apartment's Kitchen. Source: Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 155.



Image 50: Exterior view of the Splitnik. Source: Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), viii.



Image 51: The General Electric Kitchen in the Spletnik. Source: *GE Blogs*, http://visualization.geblogs.com/wp-content/viz_includes/reports/#y=67&s=3&c=4&w=3&i=1



Image 52: A Soviet visitor tests the oven in the Spletnik's kitchen. Source: *GE Blogs*, http://visualization.geblogs.com/wp-content/viz_includes/reports/#y=67&s=3&c=4&w=3&i=1



Image 53: Khrushchev and Nixon in the Spletnik's kitchen. Source: Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachman, "Kitchen as Technology and Politics: An Introduction" in *Cold War Kitchen*, eds. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachman (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 2.

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