Visions of the Future

Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s exhibition opens October 2010 at the National Building Museum

WASHINGTON, D.C.—In the midst of the Great Depression, tens of millions of visitors flocked to world’s fairs in Chicago, San Diego, Cleveland, Dallas, San Francisco, and New York where they encountered visions of a modern, technological tomorrow unlike anything seen before. Architects and industrial designers like Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes, Henry Dreyfuss, and Walter Dorwin Teague collaborated with businesses like General Motors and Westinghouse to present a golden future complete with highways, televisions, all-electric kitchens, and even robots. The National Building Museum’s new exhibition Designing Tomorrow: America’s World Fairs of the 1930s is the first-ever exhibition to consider the impact of all six American world fairs of the depression era on the popularization of modern design and the creation of a modern consumer culture. On display from October 2, 2010 through September 5, 2011, Designing Tomorrow brings together nearly 200 never-before-assembled artifacts from the six fairs. The exhibition further explores how the 1930s world’s fairs were used by leading corporations and the federal government as laboratories for experimenting with innovative display and public relations techniques, and as grand platforms for the introduction of new products and ideas to the American public.

Designing Tomorrow is organized into seven thematic galleries: Welcome to the Fairs, A Fair-going Nation, Building a Better Tomorrow, Better Ways to Move, Better Ways to Live, Better Times, and Legacies. The first gallery Welcome to the Fairs answers the question: What is a world’s fair? There visitors will discover promotional memorabilia for the fairs of the 1930s and be introduced to the industrial designers who helped shape the fair landscape. Visitors then move onto A Fair-going Nation where an oversized map of the U.S. shows the location of each of the 1930s fairs and wall displays showcase artifacts such as guidebooks, posters, and postcards from each of the fairs. The next gallery, Building a Better Tomorrow, focuses on the architecture and modern design of the fairs which included streamlined buildings, innovative display techniques, modernist murals, colored neon, and more. Travel and transportation pavilions and exhibits were some of the largest and most impressive at the fairs and are the focus of the next gallery Better Ways to Move. Visitors will view footage from the New York Fair’s Futurama display designed by Norman Bel Geddes for General Motors, which took fairgoers on a narrated trip across a 35,000-square-foot model of an imagined metropolis, and its surrounding countryside, of 1960. At the fairs, millions of visitors walked through model homes replete with innovative floor plans and modern furnishings. The Better Ways to Live gallery mimics this experience at the fairs with a space dedicated to innovative domestic architecture and furnishings from four model
homes. Through original artifacts and interactive stations the **Better Times** gallery explores how fair exhibits translated the story of scientific advances in electronics and chemistry into a promise of better, more modern living to the public. The spread of home electrification in the 1930s meant that innovations displayed at the fairs—from television to all-electric kitchens—were within reach, or soon would be. The architectural and design legacies of the 1930s world’s fairs are visible in American building and consumer culture of the past 50 years. The final gallery, **Legacies**, reveals how the fairs foretold much of what would become modern post-war America—from the national highway system to glass-walled skyscrapers and the spread of suburbia. This gallery will also answer questions such as: What happened to the fair sites? And how are the fairs remembered?

As a companion to the exhibition, *Designing Tomorrow*, a collection of essays, will be published in September 2010. The collection celebrates the influence and impact of the world’s fairs of the 1930s and the complicated negotiations brokered between tradition and avant-garde design in the cutting-edge work that was presented. The book is edited by Robert W. Rydell, consulting curator of *Designing Tomorrow* and Michael P. Malone Professor of History at Montana State University, and Laura Burd Schiavo, curator of *Designing Tomorrow* and assistant professor at the George Washington University. The collection is published by Yale University Press.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum is developing a variety of education programs intended to further examine the impact of world’s fairs on modern design. Lectures and panel discussions held throughout the run of the exhibition will focus on innovations in structural technologies at world’s fairs, world’s fairs in the 21st century, the democratization of “good design” in consumer products, and other topics. In addition, a film series highlighting the 1930s as a seminal decade in American documentary filmmaking will be held at the Museum, while another film series of modern Hollywood film fantasies will be screened in partnership with AFI Silver Theater in Silver Spring, Maryland. Visitors to the Museum can also take advantage of free, docent-led tours of the exhibition beginning October 23, 2010. For details and up-to-date information on the exhibition and associated programming, please visit [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org).

*Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s* has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Because democracy demands wisdom. McGraw-Hill Construction is the official media partner.

The **National Building Museum** is America’s leading cultural institution dedicated to advancing the quality of the built environment by educating people about its impact on their lives. Through its exhibitions, educational programs, online content, and publications, the Museum has become a vital forum for the exchange of ideas and information about the world we build for ourselves. Public inquiries: 202.272.2448 or visit [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org). Connect with us on Twitter: [@BuildingMuseum](https://twitter.com/BuildingMuseum) and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NationalBuildingMuseum](http://www.facebook.com/NationalBuildingMuseum).

**For more information, please contact Stacy Adamson at 202.272.2448, ext. 3458 or sadamson@nbm.org.**
DESIGNING · TOMORROW
AMERICA'S WORLD'S FAIRS OF THE 1930s
Through September 5, 2011
at the National Building Museum

EXHIBITION PRESS IMAGES

House of Tomorrow Living Room, Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago, 1934
Assembly Line in GM Exhibit, Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago, 1933
General Motors Building, New York World's Fair, 1940

U.S. Government Building, Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago 1933-34
Great Lakes Exposition Guidebook, Cleveland, 1936
Golden Gate Intl Exposition Guidebook, San Francisco, 1940

General Exhibits Group, Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago, 1933

For more information, contact:
Stacy Adamson, Marketing & Communications Associate, 202.272.2448, ext. 3458 / sadamson@nbm.org
House of Tomorrow Living Room,
Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago 1934
Photograph by Kauffman & Fabry, Co.

The House of Tomorrow, designed by George Fred Keck, featured modern furniture designed by Gilbert Rohde for the Herman Miller Furniture Company.

Assembly Line in GM Exhibit,
Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago, 1933
Courtesy Albert Kahn Family of Companies

General Motors showcased Chevrolet cars in their assembly line exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, Illinois.

General Motors Building, New York World’s Fair, 1940
Courtesy Albert Kahn Family of Companies.

Albert Kahn, architect and Norman Bel Geddes, designer collaborated on the General Motors Building for the New York World’s Fair in 1939. The building featured the popular Futurama exhibit that took people on a narrated trip across a 35,000-square-foot model of an imagined metropolis, and its surrounding countryside, of 1960.

U.S. Government Building,
Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago 1933-34
Photograph by Kauffman & Fabry, Co.; Collection of Jim Sweeny.

The U.S. Government Building at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, Illinois was designed by Arthur Brown, Jr. and Edward H. Bennett.

California Pacific International Exposition Guidebook,
San Diego, 1935
Collection of the National Building Museum

Great Lakes Exposition Guidebook, Cleveland, 1936
Collection of the National Building Museum

Golden Gate International Exposition Guidebook,
San Francisco, 1939
Collection of the National Building Museum

Texas Centennial Exposition Guidebook, Dallas, 1936
Collection of the National Building Museum

General Exhibits Group,
Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago, 1933
Courtesy Special Collections Research Center, The University of Chicago Library.

Director of Exterior Color Joseph Urban specified distinct and striking color combinations for all the individual buildings like the General Exhibits Group at the Century of Progress Exposition.
DESIGNING TOMORROW
AMERICA'S WORLD’S FAIRS OF THE 1930s

Through September 5, 2011
at the National Building Museum

EXHIBITION PRESS IMAGES 2

Donald Macky, Maquette, Elephant Tower, San Francisco, c. 1938.

Gilbert Rohde, Vanity and Ottoman, Chicago, 1934.

Replica of Elektro the robot standing with the original, 2010.

Model, Theme Center-New York World’s Fair 1939, c. 1938.


Raymond E. Patten, “Smartline” Kitchen Table, Chicago, 1933-1940.

Souvenir compact, New York World’s Fair, c. 1939.

Miguel Covarrubias, Mural, Native Means of Transportation in the Pacific Area, from the mural set Pageant of the Pacific, 1939-1940.


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Replica of Elektro the robot standing with the original, 2010.
Mansfield Memorial Museum / Scott Schaut, Curator.

Miguel Covarrubias, Mural, *Native Means of Transportation in the Pacific Area*, from the mural set *Pageant of the Pacific*, 1939-1940.
Courtesy of TIDA.

Gilbert Rohde, Vanity and Ottoman, 1934. Herman Miller Furniture Company, manufacturer.
Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery.

Souvenir compact, New York World’s Fair, c. 1939.
Donald G. Larson Collection on International Expositions and Fairs, Special Collections Research Center, California State University, Fresno.

Maquette, Elephant Tower [for the Portals of the Pacific], San Francisco, c. 1938. Designed by Donald Macky.

Raymond E. Patten, “Smartline” Kitchen Table, 1933-1940.
International Nickel Company and Mutschler Brothers Company, manufacturers.
Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Stiner, B.A. 1945W.


CURATOR BIOGRAPHIES

LAURA SCHIAVO

Co-curator, Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s

Laura Schiavo is a cultural historian and Assistant Professor in the Department of Museum Studies at the George Washington University. Her teaching appointment follows many years of curatorial experience at the National Building Museum (Designing Tomorrow; Form and Movement: Photographs by Philip Trager) and the City Museum of Washington, D.C. (Washington Perspectives; Taking a Closer Look: Images from the Albert H. Small Collection; Making History on the Mall: Building the Nation’s World War II Memorial), and as the Director of Museum Programs at the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington. Her research and scholarship focuses on American visual culture and identity. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the George Washington University and a B.A. from Wesleyan University.

DEBORAH SORENSEN

Co-curator, Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s

Deborah Sorensen is an assistant curator at the National Building Museum. In addition to other National Building Museum exhibitions, Ms. Sorensen has served as coordinating curator for The Places We Live, as project manager for the permanent exhibition Washington: Symbol and City, and as curatorial associate for House of Cars: Innovation and the Parking Garage. Sorensen was co-creator and program curator for the Museum’s inaugural 2005 Reel Architecture Film Series. Since 2008, she has functioned as program curator for the Museum’s annual film series, which she co-hosts with Washington Post film critic Ann Hornaday. Her research interests include the connections between architecture and film; exhibition design; and exhibition media. Ms. Sorensen earned her M.A. in Museum Studies from The George Washington University, and her B.A. in Liberal Arts within the film program at Columbia College Chicago.
EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION
Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s

WHEN
October 2, 2010 through September 5, 2011

WHERE
National Building Museum, first-floor galleries

OVERVIEW
The National Building Museum’s new exhibition Designing Tomorrow: America’s World Fairs of the 1930s is the first-ever exhibition to consider the influence of six American world fairs of the depression-era on the popularization of modern design and the creation of a modern consumer culture.

Designing Tomorrow brings together nearly 200 never-before-assembled artifacts from the six fairs. The exhibition explores how corporations and the federal government—in concert with designers and architects—developed innovative modern displays and architecture to introduce new products and ideas to the American public.

EXHIBITION LAYOUT
Designing Tomorrow: America’s World Fairs of the 1930s is divided into seven thematic galleries. Welcome to the Fairs, A Fairgoing Nation, Building a Better Tomorrow, Better Ways to Move, Better Ways to Live, Better Times, and Legacies of the Fairs. Welcome to the Fairs answers the question: What is a world’s fair? A Fairgoing Nation features an oversized map of the U.S. that shows the location of each 1930s-era fair. Building a Better Tomorrow focuses on the architecture and modern design of the fairs. Better Ways to Move allows visitors to see how streamlined planes, trains, and automobiles were put on display at the fairs. Better Ways to Live introduces the popular model home exhibits seen at the fairs and includes examples of modern furnishings that wowed fairgoers. The Better Times gallery explores how fair exhibits translated the story of scientific advances in electronics and chemistry into a promise of better, more modern living to the public. The final gallery, Legacies of the Fairs, reveals what happened to the exposition’s sites and structures and how the fairs of the 1930s foretold much of what would become modern post-war America.

CURATORS
Laura Schavio, curator
Deborah Sorensen, curator

SPONSORS
Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Because democracy demands wisdom.
GENERAL MUSEUM INFORMATION

LOCATION
The Museum is located at 401 F Street NW, Washington, D.C., at the entrance to the Judiciary Square Metro station on the Red Line.

HOURS
The Museum is open to the public Monday through Saturday, from 10 am to 5 pm, and Sunday, from 11 am to 5 pm; Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas.

ADMISSION
$8 for adults; $5 for youth, students with ID, and seniors.

TOURS
Tours will be offered to the public starting October 23, 2010 based on docent availability. Tour times are Monday – Friday at 3:15 pm, Saturday at 10:45 am and 3:15 pm, and Sunday 11:45 am and 3:15pm. Custom Tours for groups of 10 or more are available.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Electronic images are available upon request by calling the National Building Museum’s Marketing and Communications department at 202-272-2448 or emailing sadamson@nbm.org.

INFORMATION
Public information is available by calling 202-272-2448 or by visiting the Museum’s web site at www.nbm.org.

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Media Advisory FROM THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM

Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s
New exhibition examines the influence of the depression-era’s world’s fairs

Press Contact: Stacy Adamson, sadamson@nbm.org, 202.272.2448, ext. 3458

WHAT
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- **Welcome to the Fairs** answers the question: What is a world’s fair?
- **A Fairgoing Nation** features an oversized map of the U.S. that shows the location of each 1930s-era fair.
- **Building a Better Tomorrow** focuses on the architecture and modern design of the fairs.
- **Better Ways to Move** allows visitors to see how streamlined planes, trains, and automobiles were put on display at the fairs.
- **Better Ways to Live** introduces the popular model home exhibits seen at the fairs and includes examples of modern furnishings that wowed fairgoers.
- **Better Times** explores how fair exhibits translated the story of scientific advances in electronics and chemistry into a promise of better, more modern living to the public.
- **Legacies of the Fairs** reveals what happened to the expositions’ sites and structures and how the fairs of the 1930s foretold much of what would become modern post-war America.

CURATORS
Laura Schiavo, curator
Deborah Sorensen, curator

WHEN
October 2, 2010 – September 5, 2011

WHERE
National Building Museum
401 F Street NW (Judiciary Square Metro, Red Line)
First Floor Galleries

SPONSORS
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BACKGROUND

CONTACT
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