

Spacey Designs

Written by Libby Holloway
Tuesday, 19 July 2011 14:17



I am so sad that I missed watching the final space shuttle launch on Friday, as Atlantis dodged storms to rise through the clouds into outer space. I did get to watch it in reruns, but that isn't the same. I would love to have been standing on the beach in Florida with my uncle, a retired pilot, or with another uncle who spent many years of his career working for NASA. I've followed the shuttle program since the first Columbia mission lifted off in 1981. I was folding clothes in my mother's living room watching another lift off in 1986 when the Challenger suddenly blew up in the sky. I've missed watching many of the more recent lift offs, but didn't want to miss the last. After all, space travel has been part of the culture of my life.

Space travel and exploration has been a part of everyone's life since the 1940's, when we began to imagine that it wasn't just a fantasy but a possibility. A combination of a shortage of common materials used for everyday life, post-war enthusiasm for looking forward, and our obsession with keeping an eye on Russia all fed the interest in creating a Modernist environment. Architects and designers looked to new materials such as steel, aluminum, glass

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and synthetic fabrics to build and furnish our homes. Our society was ready to move forward and look toward the stars with optimism. Unfortunately, that optimistic look toward the sky was tainted with fear that bombs from Russia would fall from it.

Designers fr



om around the world began using chrome and glass to create new styles of buildings and furniture that pushed from “Streamlined Design” forward to the Modernist movement. Shapes were curvilinear and spare with sterile structures brought to life with pops of color from man-made fabrics and bright plastics. These designs were the perfect birthplace for the pieces inspired by early satellites and space travel. Even our cars sprouted rocket shaped fronts and aerodynamic fins at the rear. An iconic piece from this period was the “Sputnik” chandelier in honor of the Russian satellite by that name that launched into space on October 4, 1957. I suggest a visit to www.knoll.com where you can visit their museum site to see many designs from this period that are still popular, and available, today. Many of these forms, such as modular units, are used in workplace design but are comfortable enough for home use. I have a Mies van der Rohe inspired chair (cheap knock-off sadly) in my den along with painted Sheraton tables and oriental carpets. I think it looks perfectly at home there.

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Movies and literature glamorized space travel and excited us with the idea that we could live in space stations floating around the galaxy. These dreams fed the desire to own space age designs. I grew up watching the Jetsons and wishing I could have a machine that cooked my dinner in a few seconds, a communicator I could use to call my Mom that would actually let me see her face while we talked, or a car that would go on its own while I played a game. High-end pieces created by designers were translated into pieces that could be mass produced and sold to middle class homeowners at reasonable prices. These are the pieces that are still affordable to collect today.



The influence on pop culture is obvious and collectors are willing to pay good money for everything from comic books and plastic ray guns to examples of furniture and art of this period. Proof of the desire to own a piece of the futuristic past can be found at automobile auctions featuring cars from the late 1940's through the 1960's. Another pricey collecting area that I predict will see increases in value is that of items that have flown in space. Examples are flight suits and science experiments that were on shuttle flights. Of course, items should have firm proof of provenance. How many vials of tinted sand have been erroneously sold as "moon dust" after all?

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Let your imagination take flight... add a few fun, “spacey” elements to your decor.

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