

PIONEERS OF AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

ELEGANCE FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

The *Pioneers of American Industrial Design* stamps tell a story of everyday, useful beauty — a story that begins around the same time as the Great Depression. ¶ “Companies wanted to sell products in a difficult market,” explains Niels Diffrient, an industrial designer and consultant on the stamp project. These companies hired designers who focused on usability and streamlined aesthetics to make the products more appealing.



SHOWN AT 80%

An early version of the Henry Dreyfuss stamp featured the Big Ben clock. The final version shows his Model 302 desk telephone.

Henry Dreyfuss, one of the “godfathers” of industrial design, was so committed to understanding customers that when he was hired to design the Big Ben alarm clock, he asked the manager of Macy’s if he could work as a sales clerk in the clock department for a few days. There, he saw that customers not only looked at the clocks but also held them — judging a clock’s quality by its weight. So Dreyfuss incorporated heavy materials into the Big Ben design to make it feel substantial.

“Designs use good looks to interest people,” observes Diffrient, who knew Dreyfuss personally. “Why not the other senses?”

But industrial design did more than improve sales of consumer goods; it created an opportunity to turn common household items into works of art. Industrial designers brought influences from other areas of expertise, such as stage design and advertising.

“It crossed over,” says Derry Noyes, U.S. Postal Service art director. “An architect



(Right) Loewy’s pencil sharpener featured the same streamlined shape as his train design.



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(Top) Eliot Noyes and family members seated in the living room of the Connecticut house he designed. (Middle) A young Derry Noyes playing the accordion in the family home. (Bottom) Art Director Derry Noyes.

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was doing industrial design; people who designed furniture also designed interiors. They all knew each other, and they were all on a mission together. It was an exciting time to be in the field of design.”

Noyes can personally attest to the collaborative nature of industrial design. Her father, Eliot Noyes, was an architect and the first director of industrial design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His circle of friends included many noted designers, including Charles and Ray Eames, who were honored on a 2008 issuance also art directed by Noyes.

“They were all so excited about what they were doing,” she recalls. “You could sense it when they got together. They were like little kids at the dinner table, just talking away and turning each other on with their ideas.”

Following the lead of industrial designers, Noyes and designer Margaret Bauer sought a balance between function and beauty in the *Pioneers of American Industrial Design* pane. The first decision was to not take the standard approach of featuring the designers’ portraits on the stamps. “What’s more interesting,” Noyes says, “is what they made.”

But displaying product designs presented a challenge. The detail of a large design, such as a locomotive, would be lost at stamp size. So although Henry Dreyfuss and Raymond Loewy did in fact design trains, Noyes opted to highlight their smaller-scaled accomplishments. For Loewy, she selected a pencil sharpener, which he had given the same streamlined shape as his train design.

In addition to the four godfathers of industrial design — Dreyfuss, Teague, Bel Geddes, and Loewy — the stamps also feature Peter Müller-Munk (whose “Normandie” pitcher brought the sleek grandeur of the *Normandie* ocean liner to the dinner table), Eliot Noyes (whose smooth design for the “Selectric” captured three-fourths of the typewriter market in four years), and Russel Wright (who brought elegant simplicity to flatware).

“It makes you think a little bit,” Noyes says. “Somebody actually designed that fork. There’s a person behind it.” ●

DID YOU KNOW?

Although the *Raymond Loewy* stamp is the first to bear the name of this influential designer, Loewy’s work has had an impact on the U.S. Postal Service for more than 40 years. Loewy designed the 1964 *President John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial* stamp and in 1971, he created the memorable bald eagle logo for the newly formed U.S. Postal Service.

Loewy’s designs have also been the subject of stamps. The 1999 *All Aboard! Twentieth Century Trains* stamps included the “Congressional,” which featured the GG-1 electric locomotive designed by Loewy for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. And his 1953 Studebaker Starliner was featured on the *America on the Move: 50s Sporty Cars* stamp pane issued in 2005.