



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the George Nakashima Papers,
1950-1991, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	George Nakashima papers
Identifier:	AAA.nakageor
Date:	1950-1991
Extent:	1 Linear foot
Creator:	Nakashima, George, 1905-1990
Language:	The collection is in English and Japanese.
Summary:	The papers of architect, craftsman, woodworker, and furniture designer George Nakashima measure 1.0 linear foot and date from 1950 to 1991. The collection is comprised of biographical material, correspondence, writings, subject files, and printed material that mostly relate to Nakashima's work in furniture design.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were donated by Marion Nakashima, widow of George Nakashima, in 1991.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2018.

Preferred Citation

George Nakashima papers, 1950-1991. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center.

Biographical / Historical

George Nakashima (1905-1990) was a Japanese American architect, craftsman, woodworker, and furniture designer in New Hope, Pennsylvania. He was born in Spokane, Washington and received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Washington in 1929. He also earned a master's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1930.

After his studies, Nakashima traveled around the world by steamship. He spent time in France, North Africa, and Japan. While in Japan, he began working under architect Antonin Raymond. When Raymond's

architecture company was commissioned to build for the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Puducherry, India, Nakashima became the onsite architect as well as a devotee of Sri Aurobindo. When World War II began, Nakashima returned to the U.S. with his wife, Marion, whom he met in Japan. George, Marion, and their infant daughter Mira were sent to a Japanese internment camp in Idaho in 1942. The Nakashimas were able to leave the camp after Raymond sponsored their release in 1943. Nakashima began working on Raymond's farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where he eventually built his workshop. Nakashima's son Kevin was born after the family relocated to Pennsylvania.

Nakashima's design work includes furniture lines for the Widdicomb Furniture Company and Knoll Furniture, and 200 pieces of furniture commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller. He also wrote a book titled *The Soul of a Tree: A Master Woodworker's Reflections*.

Nakashima died in 1990.

Scope and Contents

The papers of architect, craftsman, woodworker, and furniture designer George Nakashima measure 1.0 linear foot and date from 1950 to 1991. The collection is comprised of biographical material, correspondence, writings, subject files, and printed material that mostly relate to Nakashima's work in furniture design.

Biographical materials consist of a curriculum vitae and obituaries. Correspondence is with clients, colleagues, and friends in the United States, Japan, and the Sri Aurobindo community. Writings by and about Nakashima include articles, essays, and a speech about his design processes. Subject files are on Alfred Caldwell, flush toilet systems, trademark, and wood and tree services. Printed material includes art reproductions, booklets, catalogs, clippings, and publicity material.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as five series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1990 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1950-1990 (Box 1; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 3: Writings, 1953-1989 (Box 1, 2 folders)
- Series 4: Subject Files, 1957-1980s (Box 1, 4 folders)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1954-1991 (Box 1, 0.2 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Architect-designed furniture
Artisans
Asian American architects
Asian American art
Asian American artists

Asian American furniture designers
Asian American woodworkers
Decorative arts
Furniture making
Japanese American art
Japanese American artists
Japanese Americans -- Evacuation and relocation, 1942-1945
Woodworkers
handicrafts

Names:

Caldwell, Alfred, 1903-1998

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1990

1 Folder (Box 1)

This series contains Nakashima's curriculum vitae, a memorial service bulletin, and photocopies of his obituaries.

Box 1, Folder 1

Biographical Material, 1990

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1950-1991

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1)

This series consists of general chronological files and named files. Chronological correspondence spans four decades and includes letters with clients, colleagues, and friends regarding business dealings, visits to Nakashima's workshop, and his ongoing affiliation with the Sri Aurobindo community. Named files are for awards, an exhibition at the Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce, correspondents in Japan, scholar and Sri Aurobindo devotee Vasant Merchant, correspondence regarding Nakashima's book titled *The Soul of the Tree: A Woodworker's Reflections*, and letters from the Sri Aurobindo temple.

Box 1, Folder 2	General, undated
Box 1, Folder 3	General, 1950-1960
Box 1, Folder 4	General, 1961-1969
Box 1, Folder 5	General, 1970-1979
Box 1, Folder 6-17	General, 1980-1989
Box 1, Folder 18	General, 1990
Box 1, Folder 19	Awards, Regarding, 1982-1985 Includes material on the Order of the Sacred Treasure awarded by the Emperor of Japan and the Altar for Peace.
Box 1, Folder 20	Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce Exhibition, 1988
Box 1, Folder 21	Japan, circa 1963-1989
Box 1, Folder 22-23	Merchant, Vasant, 1982-1987
Box 1, Folder 24	<i>The Soul of the Tree: A Woodworker's Reflections</i> , Regarding, 1981-1982
Box 1, Folder 25-27	Sri Aurobindo Matrimandir, 1965-1989

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Series 3: Writings, 1953-1989

2 Folders (Box 1)

Writings by Nakashima include essays and a speech delivered to the New York Herald Tribune Forum on his design process and how his craft is connected to the natural and spiritual world. Writings about Nakashima include a translated article from *Kateigaho* magazine, "A Tree of Destiny" by Richard A. Ek, and article excerpts printed onto a single page.

Box 1, Folder 28 By Nakashima, 1953, undated

Box 1, Folder 29 About Nakashima, 1978-1989

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Series 4: Subject Files, 1957-1980s

4 Folders (Box 1)

This series contains mainly printed materials but also contains some correspondence and photographs in files for architecture professor Alfred Caldwell, flush toilet systems, trademarks, and wood and tree services.

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|------------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 30 | Caldwell, Alfred, circa 1980s
Includes a speech transcript and photocopy of "The Hex of Harmony" by Caldwell. |
| Box 1, Folder 31 | Flush Toilet Systems, 1976 |
| Box 1, Folder 32 | Trademark, 1957
Includes an engraving copy of a hand drawn logo for Nakashima's business. |
| Box 1, Folder 33 | Wood and Tree Services, circa 1960-1980s
Includes photographs of cut trees, tables, and clocks. |

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1954-1991

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Art reproductions of St. James in Pennington, New Jersey, booklets, catalogs and clippings relating to Nakashima, and publicity material for exhibitions and events are in printed materials.

Box 1, Folder 34	Art Reproductions, circa 1986
Box 1, Folder 35	Booklets, circa 1980s
Box 1, Folder 36-37	Catalogs, Furniture, circa 1960-1991
Box 1, Folder 38-39	Clippings, 1954-1991 Almost all newspaper clippings are photocopies.
Box 1, Folder 40	Publicity, Exhibitions and Events, 1963-1991

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