



Smithsonian
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

Donald Deskey collection, 1927-1989

2011

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Libraries
Title:	Donald Deskey collection
Identifier:	SIL-CH.1975-11-77
Date:	1927-1989
Extent:	75 Cubic feet
Creator:	Deskey, Donald, 1894-
Language:	English .
Summary:	Project files contain magazine and newspaper clippings, reviews, correspondence, renderings, floor plans, perspective drawings, site plans, sketches, preliminary drawings, patents, stationery, labels, and technical reports. There is an extensive collection of photographs and slides of many of Deskey's packaging designs, interiors, furnishings, and exhibition installations. The files of Donald Deskey Associates include organizational charts, client files, proposals, and financial records. Some of Deskey's personal correspondence, speeches, articles, and family photographs are included. Materials cover the period from 1927-1975.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Deskey collection was donated to the museum in three installments.

In 1975, Deskey deposited at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,, hundreds of drawings, 3 four-drawer file cabinets of material, and several oversized packages comprising the bulk of his papers covering the period from 1927-1965. These items were officially donated to the museum in 1988.

In 1992, Deskey Associates of New York made an additional gift consisting of, approximately 1,000 35mm slides that documented projects from the 1960s through 1980s, and focused primarily on designs for packaging.

In 1994, Donald Deskey's nephew, Robert Deskey presented the Museum with, 120 postcards, letters, and family photographs.

Other Finding Aids

File folder list.

Restrictions

Unrestricted research use onsite by appointment. Permission of staff required to photograph materials.

Biographical Note

Industrial, interior, and packaging designer. Born Blue Earth, Minnesota, November 23, 1894. By 1943, he had established Donald Deskey Associates in New York. Along with Dreyfuss, Bel Geddes, and Loewy, Deskey was one of the great industrial design pioneers in the 1930s.

He is best known for his designs for the furnishings and interiors of Radio City Music Hall in 1932, and for his work for companies such as: Widdicomb Furniture Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan; W & J Sloane, New York; and Estey Manufacturing Company, Owosso, Michigan. Deskey is also known for his familiar packaging designs for Procter & Gamble products, such as Crest toothpaste, Prell shampoo, and Tide detergent.

Donald Deskey Associates also was responsible for lamppost #10, the streetlight still in use today in New York City. Materials from this archival collection were featured in Cooper-Hewitt's 1994 exhibition and accompanying book, "Packaging the New: Design and the American Consumer, 1925- 1975."

Arrangement

Arranged into six records groups: 1) architecture/interiors projects; 2) Donald Deskey Associates; 3) industrial design projects; 4) reference; 5) Donald Deskey's personal papers; and 6) photographs. A special collection of more than one thousand slides of Deskey's work are boxed separately.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Drawings and Prints Department. Approximately 3,000 drawings for furniture and textile designs.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Applied Arts Department. Two tables, handles, and a glass bottle and box designed by Deskey.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Textiles Department. One textile designed by Deskey.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

Other sources of archival information on Deskey include, the Procter & Gamble Archive, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Deskey Associates, New York City.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art deco -- United States
- Buildings, Prefabricated -- United States
- Design, Industrial -- United States
- Furniture design -- United States
- Interior decoration -- United States -- 20th century
- Packaging -- Design
- Plastics -- Design
- Street lighting -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

- Client lists
- Clippings
- Correspondence
- Drawings
- Financial records
- Labels
- Lantern slides
- Letters patent
- Organizational charts
- Patents
- Photographs
- Proposals
- Renderings
- Reviews
- Slides
- Stationery
- Technical reports

Names:

- Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company
- Centre de recherche en économie et statistique (Paris, France)
- Charak Furniture Company
- Cooper-Hewitt Design Archive
- Deskey Associates, Inc.
- Deskey, Donald, 1894-
- Deskey-Vollmer, Inc.
- Donald Deskey Associates, Inc.
- Johnson & Johnson, Inc.
- New York World's Fair (1939-1940)
- Procter & Gamble Company

Radio City Music Hall (New York, N.Y.)
Widdicomb Furniture Company

Occupations:

Industrial designers -- United States
Interior designers -- United States
Packaging designers -- United States