

The Art of Design in Radio

By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Fellow, AWA Fellow

S-T-E-A-M means Science, Technology, Engineering, *ART* and Mathematics. On the technical side of radio, of, course, there's lots of S-T-E-M. Yet from the earliest days of radio coming into the home, art played a role, because design had to satisfy the market once the technology assured reception. Some say the Atwater Kent breadboards show this, because the radio could have come in a box, like the Federal sets, but the breadboard style made them way more interesting, as sort of faux scientific apparatus.

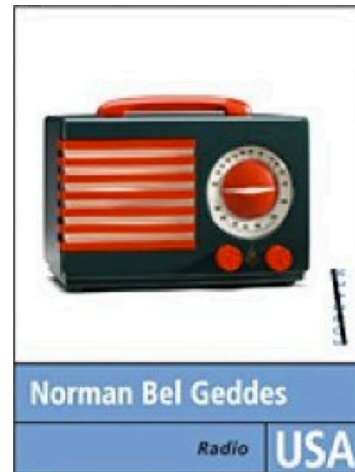
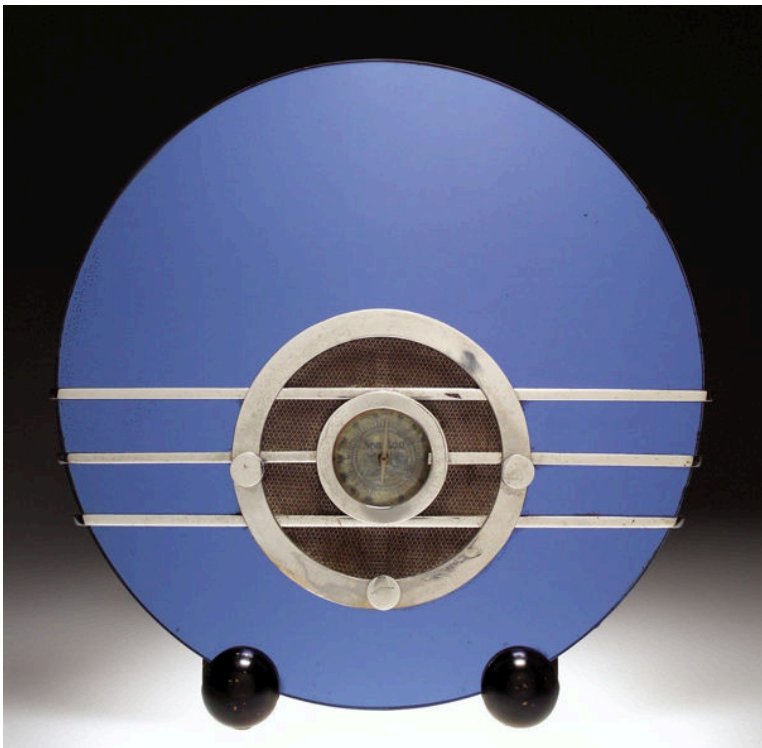


An AK-10 Radiodyne, x author's collection,
now at CHRS RadioCentral, and AK horn speaker

Designer Radios captured the high end of the market in the 1930s. Design may be the most important factor leading to collectability in radios, rather than technical aspects. A famous

designer lends a radio caché that translates to cash upon sale and higher prices for buyers.

Walter Dorwin Teague designed the iconic Sparton Bluebird radio in 1935. Normal Bel Geddes designed the sometimes red, white and (more or less) blue catalin Patriot Emerson table radio of 1939, recently honored on a U.S. stamp. This radio came in several color variants.



After World War Two, Charles and Ray Eames designed many wonderful things, including wood radios as well as their famous chairs. Pictured are three featured in the *Wall Street Journal*.

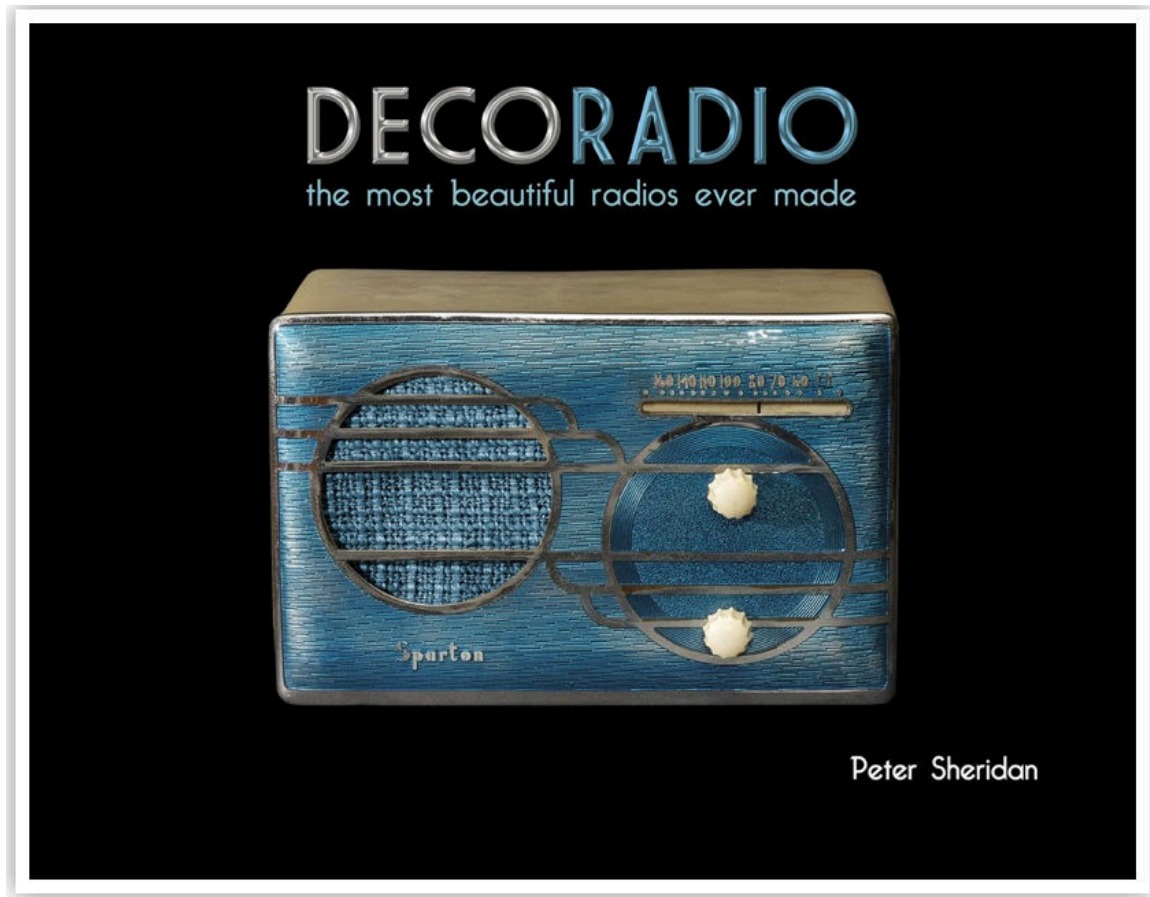


The *Wall Street Journal* graphic is attributed: F. Martin Ramin (photo), styling by Anne Cardenas (May 30, 2015 p. D 10). The stamp design above is that of the U.S. Postal Service.

From left to right they are a 1946 Zenith, an Emerson in the middle and a Zenith 6DO3OZ. This last has shown up in CHRS swap meets, for \$20 or so. These designer radios in good shape sell for well over \$1,000.

The Eames brothers developed a process for making plywood cabinets and produced as many as 200,000 into the early 1950s.

A couple of years ago, Radio Central Volunteer Cynthia Edwards Reinholtz put a copy of a wonderful book: *Deco Radio: The Most Beautiful Radios Ever Made*, in the silent auction for Radio by the Bay Day. Below is a picture of its cover and an example.



The *New York Times* wrote: *Radios Worth Seeing* -- An Australian dentist has amassed a collection of some 300 antique radios and detailed many of them in a new book, *DECO RADIO: THE MOST BEAUTIFUL RADIOS EVER MADE* (Schiffer Publishing). That review by Eve M. Kahn follows:

“ On a visit to Manhattan to promote the book, the dentist, Peter Sheridan, explained how the portable radios succeeded a generation of bulky models meant for living-room gatherings, giving wives and children a way to sneak off and listen to their favorite programs in private, for example. He also pointed out design and technological similarities in radios from European, American and Australian manufacturers who were copying one another.

“A few of Dr. Sheridan's 1940s German radios came from companies under Nazi control. On a Russian radio, made in 1954, a Communist red star crowns the striated caramel case, and dials are labeled so listeners could easily find broadcasts from various Communist capitals. Dr. Sheridan has spent two decades acquiring the radios, which date to the 1920s, along with related advertisements, catalogs and instruction booklets.

“The round, amoeboid and heptagonal forms were the brainchildren of celebrated designers including Isamu Noguchi, Walter Dorwin Teague, Norman Bel Geddes, and Charles and Ray Eames. ***”



PETER SHERIDAN

A Deco radio in the collection.

“The radios typically cost a few thousand dollars each. Dr. Sheridan has tracked them down through friends, dealers and auction houses including Christie's, Bonhams and Leonard Joel in Melbourne, Australia. He will accept some wear and tear and replaced knobs, if the shapes and colors are irresistible.

“ ‘Rarity triumphs perfection,’ he said, pointing to minor rim scratches on a 1938 blue-glass heptagon designed by Teague.

“Functional wiring is not crucial for him. When one of his 1935 Radio-Glo models in colored glass is plugged in, he said, ‘the light inside may come on and nothing else.’

“He researched, wrote and designed the book himself and took the photographs, mostly of his own holdings. He keeps buying; half a dozen purchases arrived while he was away on his American book tour in September. He is adding discoveries to his website, decoradio.com, and the public is welcome to submit news to the site's addenda section. Although his book covers inventions from 15 countries, he said, ‘I might have missed something!’ ”

(*New York Times*, Antiques, October 3, 2014)

The website Decophobia also reviewed the Sheridan book (used by permission, summarizing texts from Decoradio.com):

“Great Newly Published Book on Catalin + Deco Radios

“*Deco Radio: The Most Beautiful Radios Ever Made* by Peter Sheridan is a sumptuous photographic display of 350 of the most beautiful radios ever made. This is the untold story of how radio was the medium for industrial designers to bring Art Deco styling and color into the home... plus a superb photographic gallery of over 300 rare and desirable radios to inspire the collector in all of us. If you’re a lover of design and of beautiful things from the past then these 80 year old radios will astonish you with their elegance, vibrance and modernity.

“This great hardcover 12" by 9" book contains 380 brilliant photos + engaging text, this book presents some of the rarest and most beautiful catalin, bakelite + wood radios ever made for home or workplace. The advent of the small, mantle or tabletop radio in 1930 gave a huge impetus to the spread of radio, not only allowing multiple sets in the home, but changing the listener from the family to the individual. This book highlights a small subset of tube radios that

incorporated new styling, materials, and approaches to consumer marketing in the 1930s and 1940s. Until now they have been underrated by many radio enthusiasts, and largely unrecognized in the world of Art Deco and Industrial Design. The radios of 35 industrial designers, including the luminaries of streamlining in the USA and UK (Loewy, Bel Geddes, Teague, Van Doren, Vassos, Coates, and Chermayeff) are identified + examples from 15 countries are stunningly displayed.

“The books author Peter Sheridan is a respected historian, lecturer, author and collector. He has written a number of monographs on Art Deco and lectured at Art Deco World Congresses in 2007 and 2013. Peter Sheridan is also the author of the highly acclaimed book '*Radio Days – Australian Bakelite Radios*' (2008) is the standard reference for Australian radio collectors.

“This book may be purchased on-line or at your local bookseller. Information on the book can be found by going to DecoRadio.com or by searching: *Deco Radio: The Most Beautiful Radios Ever Made* by Peter Sheridan. I highly recommend this book for collectors of Art Deco radios or for new collectors who want to research and learn prior to buying radios. Publisher: Schiffer Publishing, Limited ©2014”

The industrial designer Raymond Lowry, engaged by Hallicrafters, designed the post war S-38 (many a boy's first real radio), the award winning SX-42, the ultimate shortwave radio the SX-62, and the Hallicrafters' television set. The SX-62 provided great audio from a push-pull 2x-6V6 output stage. It is a SWL-dressed SX-42, one of the best. The Hallicrafters television, (T54) came into production in 1948 with a Channel One available, but the hams got that as the six meter band. The S-38 defined the proper look for a boy's short wave radio for many years, followed for example by the Lafayette HE-10 (made by Trio (Kenwood) in Japan).



SX-62, from w2dtc.com/w2dtc-sx-62-receiver-page.htm, a restoration guide with useful information. An SX-62 will be featured in the Hall of Communications, 540 KHz to 60 MHz, AM, FM & CW.



Hallicrafters T-54 in the SX-62 metal cabinet, which followed the T-505 in a wood cabinet. Note Channel One.

(v2, de K6VK) ##