

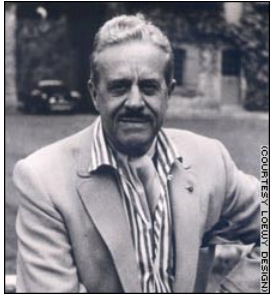
## Planes, trains, automobiles, Coke bottles

### The world Raymond Loewy created

By Todd Leopold, CNN

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ATLANTA, Georgia (CNN) — They're items you see every day. Air Force One? His design. Streamlined locomotives? His doing. The logos for Nabisco, Exxon, Shell and Sealtest? His, his, his and his again.



Raymond Loewy is called "the father of industrial design" for a reason. He took ugly consumer items — pencil sharpeners, refrigerators — and made them beautiful. He

designed cars that were a decade or more ahead of their time. He created kitchen appliances, crockery and furniture, and did design work for Greyhound, the U.S. Postal Service and NASA.

It's not for nothing that Loewy, who was born in Europe in 1893 and died in 1986, titled one of his books, "Never Leave Well Enough Alone." "Raymond started industrial design and the streamlining movement," architect Philip Johnson once said. "He designed everything from lipstick to locomotives," observes Laura Moody of the Museum of Design Atlanta, which is showing an exhibit of his work, "Raymond Loewy: Designs for a Consumer Culture," through the end of December. After its Atlanta stop, the exhibition will work its way across the United States over the next two years.

Even today, his work — which dates back to the 1920s — looks startlingly modern, with clean lines, minimal fussiness and creative use of color. "When he was a young boy, he was inspired by beauty and speed," says his daughter, Laurence Loewy, who watches over her father's estate. "[He said that] good design was not a veneer. It was an integral part of the project."

#### 'Most advanced, yet acceptable'

The exhibit features a number of Loewy's greatest hits. There's a mid-1930s Sears Coldspot refrigerator, a sleek white appliance that won an award from a Paris design fair. (One interesting touch: Instead of pulling a handle, you push a large rectangular button to open the door.)

There's Melamine dishware by Lucent — mid-'50s plates and saucers made from a

form of plastic, yet delicately designed by Loewy to give the appearance of china — and 1950s color charts and posters showcasing Loewy's work for Formica (including countertops with the popular Googie forms of the time) and Arvin (a "Loewy-designed dinette set," trumpets an advertisement, illustrating the value of the Loewy name).

Against one column is a futuristic 1946 television that looks like an oscilloscope, and one area is dominated by vintage Coca-Cola materials designed by Loewy, including a fountain, a jukebox and some Coke bottles. And all along the walls are many photos of Loewy's creations and the man himself, including the October 31, 1949, cover of Time magazine.

"He always intuited what the customer wanted," says Laurence Loewy, her house in suburban Atlanta lined with Loewy paraphernalia. "He always had good taste, and the sense not to push the envelope too far." His motto, she adds, was "MAYA" — "most advanced, yet acceptable."



#### 'Always bringing home a new toaster'

Ironically, though Loewy received constant commissions and accolades from manufacturers, he found it hard to obtain work on some of his favorite machines — automobiles. "Detroit considered him a renegade," says his daughter.

He did get work from the Indiana-based Studebaker auto company, and his early '50s Studebakers are models of grace: the 1953 Starliner, which some consider the first American sports car, was voted one of the 10 most beautiful designs in an auto writers' poll and is now featured on a stamp. But Loewy was constantly pushing for lighter, safer and more efficient at a time when the American auto business was dominated by

heavy, chrome-laden powerhouses with portholes, torpedoed bumpers and fins.

"Dad called [General Motors designer] Harley Earl's designs 'chrome-plated barges,'" chuckles Laurence Loewy. "He said that, if left to his own devices, Harley Earl would put fins on a TV or refrigerator." As a person, she says, he liked "a stiff drink, a good smoke and a hearty laugh." He had a fondness for antiques, and when he was away from his studios, he enjoyed himself, she remembers — he had houses in Palm Springs, California, and the French Riviera, was a gourmet cook and took time for reflection. But he was always curious about the practical uses of his work, she says.

"He was always bringing home a new toaster, a new mixer, for the staff to use and critique," Laurence Loewy says. "He had his own in-house focus group."

At their peak, designers such as Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes and Henry Dreyfuss were household names. Then, for decades, design was something often taken for granted by the public. It wasn't until recently, with Target's focus on Michael Graves and Philippe Starck, that design has become celebrated again.

"[The exhibit] showcases a time when design had come to the forefront," says MODA's Moody. "I think we're seeing that resurgence again."

Indeed, the Raymond Loewy Foundation offers several awards to design professionals, and works to bring design and related issues to the attention of the public, Laurence Loewy says.

Her father would find much to admire today, she says. "He would admire [car designer] J Mays' work — the Volkswagen [New] Beetle, the Mustang, the Thunderbird ... He'd own a Macintosh laptop and would listen to an iPod. But," she adds, "he would complain that cell phones are too small, that an aging population would have problems using the devices."

As the exhibit of his work shows, it just takes a desire to get it right — for the product and the public, she says. "There are some simple requirements," she says. "A little logic, some good taste and the willingness to cooperate."

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