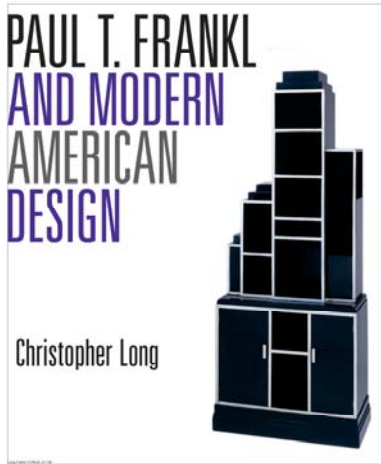


Paul T. Frankl and Modern American Design / Christopher Long.—New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, May 2007.—240 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-300-12102-5 (cl., alk. paper): \$50.00.



Frankl (1886-1958) was a prolific creator of interiors and furniture during the early twentieth century, and his clientele was chiefly the elite of New York and, after a move in 1934, California. The book is largely a chronological biography, but along the way, Long uses Frankl's life as a lens through which we glimpse the development of modern design in America.

Long thoroughly researched his subject here, but the exhaustive depth with which he treats Frankl's privileged Viennese childhood, his poor performances as an architecture student, and his early years in New York result in a slow start to the book. More interesting is the portion of the book following Frankl's creation of his "skyscraper furniture" in 1925. Collectors of art books will enjoy Frankl's account of his inspiration for this line of furniture: "I had an assemblage of books littered all over... amongst them profusely illustrated architectural tomes, large in format, some coverless, awkward to handle, impossible to fit in any existing space. To straighten things out and bring order out of chaos, I went after some boards and with a saw set to work fitting the case to the

books, since the books would not fit a case."

It is not Frankl's designs, however, that emerge as his greatest contribution to modernism. Though Long strives to remain objective throughout, he indicates repeatedly that Frankl's discussions of modernism lacked originality, his books were "confused," and his designs were sometimes conservative or borrowed heavily from trends in Europe. Nonetheless, Frankl played an important role in the popularizing of design through his moderate approach and tireless advocacy; he sought every opportunity to argue that twentieth-century Americans should not inhabit spaces styled for Europeans centuries earlier. Long does not argue for Frankl's importance, but ably sketches the man and allows readers to draw their own conclusions.

This first monograph since 1940 on Frankl is accessible to all audiences. With its thorough index featuring the scores of notable individuals Frankl encountered (from Frank Lloyd Wright to Fred Astaire), an exhaustive 25-page bibliography, and more than 150 images, this book was planned with researchers in mind. It is an essential acquisition for comprehensive collections on design, modernism, furniture, or interiors.

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