

A vote for the new classics

(AP) — While in the Midwest this spring, Lou Gropp, editor of *Elle Decor* Magazine, went furniture shopping. In a shop on an Indiana farmstead, he saw some furniture by Paul McCobb, an American designer active in the 1950s.

"There were three chests and several stacking pieces," he said, "and they were not cheap — the figure of \$5,000 for the set sticks in my mind."

What greater proof, asked Gropp, that postwar modern American furniture designs are becoming classics? It's a positive sign, he said, since he regards the 1950s as one of the most creative in American design.

It was an era when designers such as McCobb, Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, George Nelson and Harry Bertola were at their peak.

"Whenever Eames or Saarinen introduced a new piece, it was a major event."

MODERNISM in furniture design and architecture has been getting a bad rap recently, but it still has a loyal following, especially among arbiters of taste such as Gropp, who put his stamp on *House & Garden* and other publications before joining *Elle Decor*.

Although Gropp is constantly exposed to the latest furniture designs at work, his personal acquisitions are carefully measured. When he and his wife, Jane, recently moved to a new apartment in New York City, they took with them some pieces they have owned for more than 30 years.

Most of their acquisitions are from the second half of the 20th century — furniture by individuals who today are icons of modern design.

GROPP SAID his love for modernism began when, as a recent college graduate, he managed to save \$500 to furnish his first New York apartment. He wound up with two chairs and a bedroom dresser by Eames and a bench by Nelson.

Over the years, Gropp said, his respect for this furniture has grown, and he has slowly added more of the increasingly expensive pieces.

"I saved up for a long time to buy the leather Eames armchair and ottoman."

Two plywood dining chairs by Eames, which now sell for hundreds of dollars more than their original price, came his way for next to nothing.

He bid on one at auction. "Scared to death, I raised my hand and bid \$5, and I got it."

Years later, he picked up the second chair from the streets of Manhattan.

"Someone who didn't realize what they had threw it out, and I rescued it."

THOUGH OF THE 20th century, the pieces are classics, said Gropp, who sees youth as no deterrent to timelessness. "There are many lovely things we fall in love with momentarily, but classics are those pieces that look as good today as when they were first introduced."

"A classic doesn't happen by accident, and it isn't about fashion. It takes a long time to develop and a good deal of experimentation, false starts and refinements."

A number of landmark pieces offer both new technology and design departures, he said. "Eames' molded chairs, which combined molded wood and new adhesives, rubber mounts and steel with great design, were a first which started a new range of designs."

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— Lou Gropp

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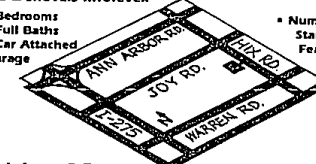
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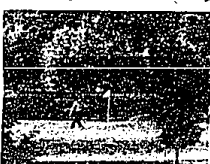


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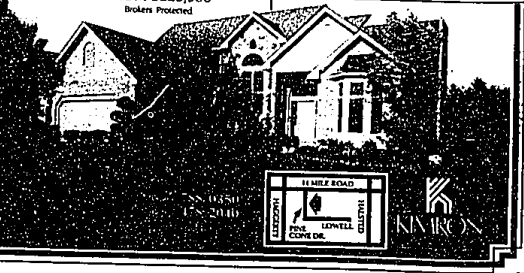
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