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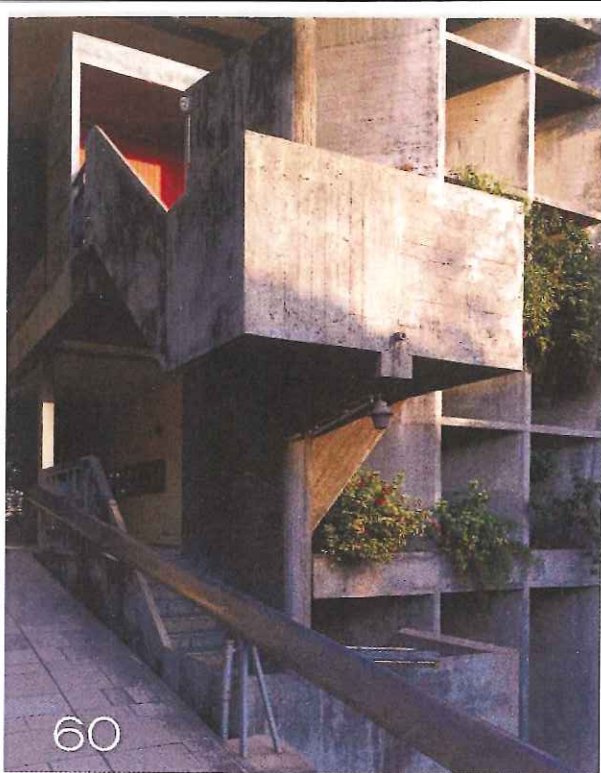
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Collection of Museum of Contemporary Craft. Photo by Dan Kvika.

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On the cover The living room of the Round
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Frederik Nielsen and recently renovated by its
new owners. Photo by Jakob Helbig.

Top, right Betty Feves, *Three Figures No. 4*, 1955.
Stoneware. At the Museum of Contemporary
Craft, Portland, Oregon.



EDITOR'S WORD



The modernist idea seems to be infinitely flexible.
Following its trail through time and around the
world is like wending one's way along a beach,
marveling at the unending variety of glinting,
colored pebbles thrown up by the sea.

In this issue, we travel to India, not to the famous
Chandigarh, but to Ahmedabad, where Le Corbusier
and Louis Kahn molded their modernist approaches to the blinding
sun and unrelenting heat, inspiring, through their ardent search for an
appropriate architectural response to this specific place, a young local
architect, Balkrishna Doshi, who went on to develop his own version of
Indian modernism.

We jump across the globe to early 20th-century Mexico City, where
graphic designers, in search of a fitting identity for their new republic,
borrowed freely from European Art Deco, developing a bold, irreverent
and satirical style that invigorated the dozens of culture and politics
magazines that sprang up after the revolution.

We also visit Denmark, where, in 1951, a self-taught builder, musician
and chemistry whiz designed and built a circular house for his family.
Now, newly renovated, brightly colored and filled with vintage Danish
design, it provides an unusual home for a young family.

Back in the United States, we consider the role that legions of now
nameless retailers played in introducing modernist design to ordinary
Americans with a look at the career of Betty Price, who forged a close
working relationship with Herman Miller's star designer George Nelson
at the birth of his meteoric career.

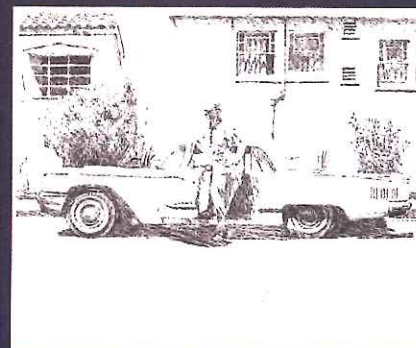
We also look at the phenomenon of Streamlining, that symbolization
of speed, cleanliness, efficiency and power in everything from steam
engines to irons that embodied an anxious public's hopes during
the Great Depression, and demonstrated the power of style to drive
consumer decisions.

Finally, to introduce the new exhibition "Crafting Modernism:
Midcentury American Art and Design" at the Museum of Arts and
Design in New York, we look at the complicated relationship between
the ancient art of craft and modern form and technology through the
prism of six very different chairs.

As always, we hope to entice you to read about things you might
never have heard of or taken an interest in. But we also want to know
what you like and what you want to see in the magazine. So please,
let us know by going to modernismmagazine.com and filling out our
reader survey. Thanks!

—Andrea Truppin

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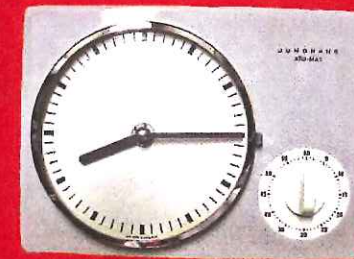
Robert Bechtle
"1960 T-Bird", 1967 etching

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Betty Price and George Nelson

SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT MODERN DESIGN

By Sandra Seaton



Collection of Don and Betty Price.



Vitra Design Museum Archives, Weil am Rhein, Germany.

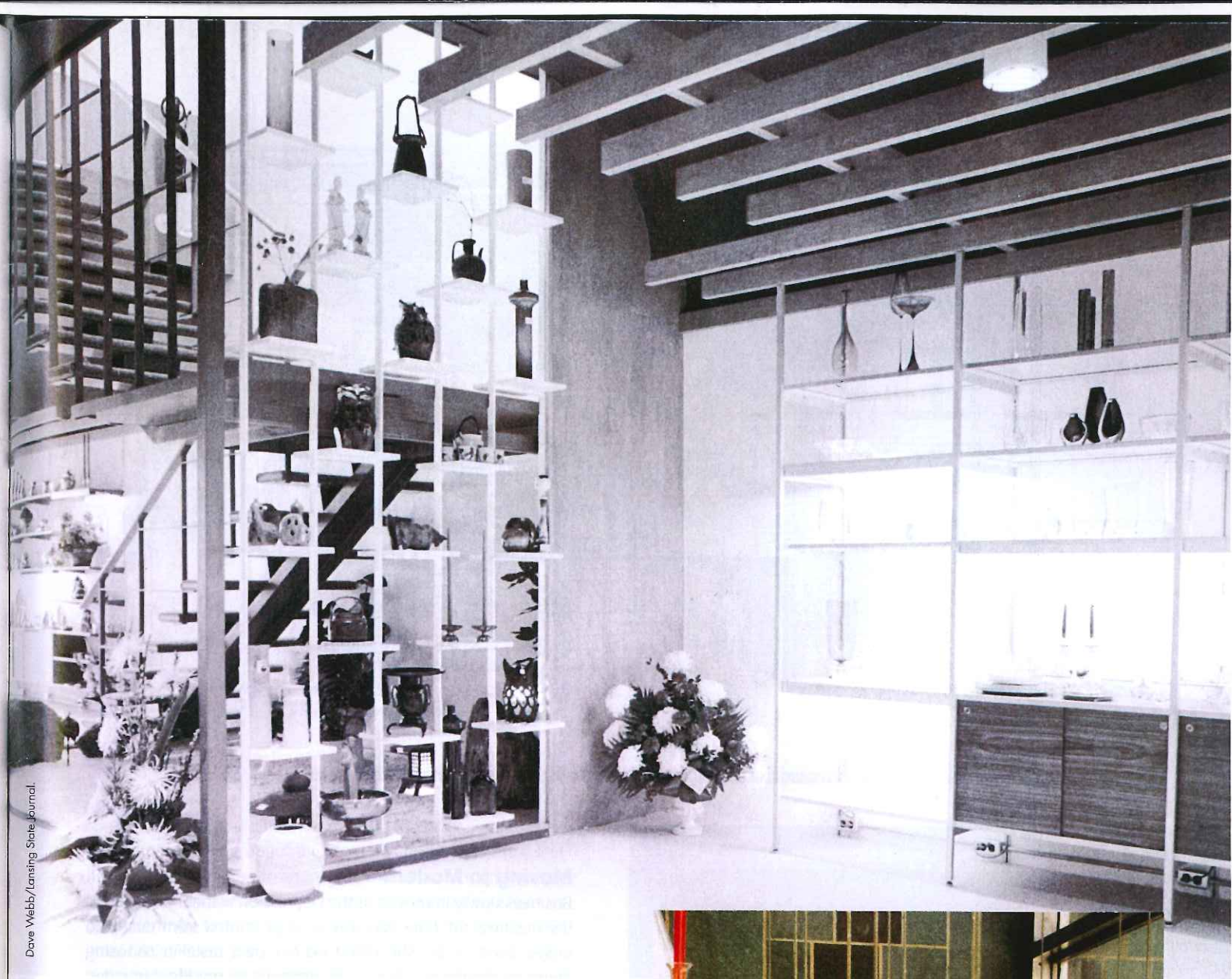
I am sitting with Betty Price in the living room of her Ken Black modernist home in East Lansing, Michigan, where she has lived since 1946. At 97, after a 50-year career in retailing at Liebermann's in Lansing, Michigan, she is a storehouse of information about the introduction of modernist design to the Midwestern marketplace. The Charles Eames lounge chair across from us was purchased as a gift for her late husband, Don, in 1959. Her son, visual artist Tom Price, is sitting in a Hans Wegner chair. The Wegner table in the dining room stood on the lower level of the store in 1949. That same year, the black George Nelson *Atomic* clock on the wall behind us, now a classic, arrived in the first shipment of the clocks that Price ordered from Herman Miller. Betty Price was still ordering them when Nelson designed the magnificent Liebermann's store at 113 Washington Avenue in Lansing for her and Don in 1965. Through her involvement in the design of that store, her relationship with George Nelson, her bold, individualistic choice of merchandise and her down-to-earth charm, Betty Price exemplifies the legions of unsung retailers across the United States who played an essential role in making modernist design appealing to American consumers. "My customers didn't always understand good contemporary design," she recalls. "It came slow to some. They would say: 'Betty, that looks awful.' I'd smile and tell them who designed it. Little by little, I'd educate them. I would start with small things: bookends and a lamp. They'd have to imagine it in their own situation. I was always gracious to people whether they were disagreeable about what we had or not. When they walked through our front door, they were our guests."

All in the Family

Born in Saginaw, Michigan, Betty Boettcher Price was destined for a life in retailing. Her great uncle, Julius R. Liebermann, founded Liebermann's Trunk Company, a leather goods store, in 1893; her father, Hugo Boettcher, worked there. After school, the young Betty would race downtown, cut through the alley and into the back door of the store. "I was in the fourth grade, just old enough to walk downtown by myself, too young to work in the store, but I loved it," she says. "The names of the companies didn't mean anything to me at that point, names like Margolin and Ganson, but they were beautiful leather bags, hand-made. Finally, they put me in charge of children's handbags, but

Left, top Betty Price in her store in 1948, holding a copper bowl by Serge Negrassoff.

Left The entrance to Liebermann's 113 Washington store, Lansing, Michigan, features George Nelson's dramatic façade with its four 22-foot-high glass panels, 1965.



Dave Webb/Lansing State Journal.

Above George Nelson designed the interior of Liebermann's at 113 Washington in 1965. Features included a Japanese garden, with pebbles, lanterns and exotic plants, underneath the floating stairs, flanked by a transparent display wall. At right is Nelson's CSS shelving, designed for Herman Miller, used here in one of its first applications.

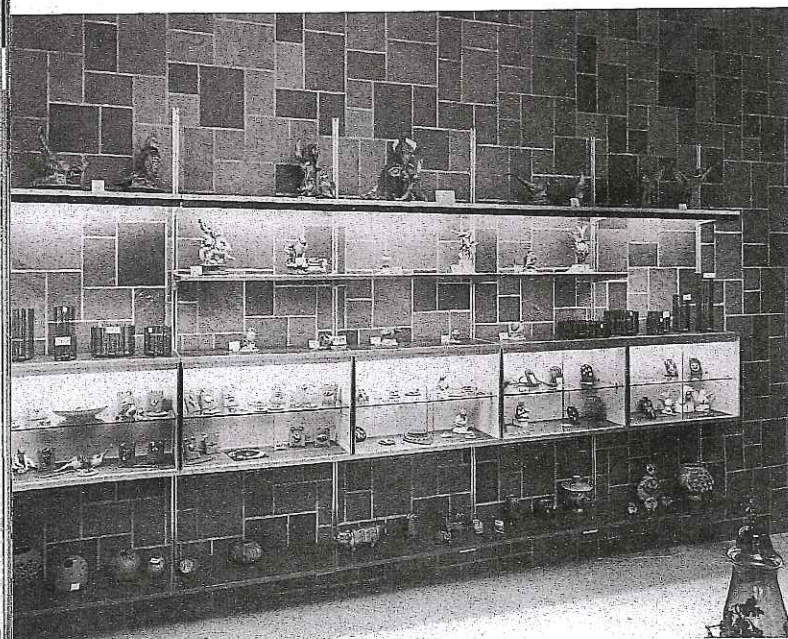
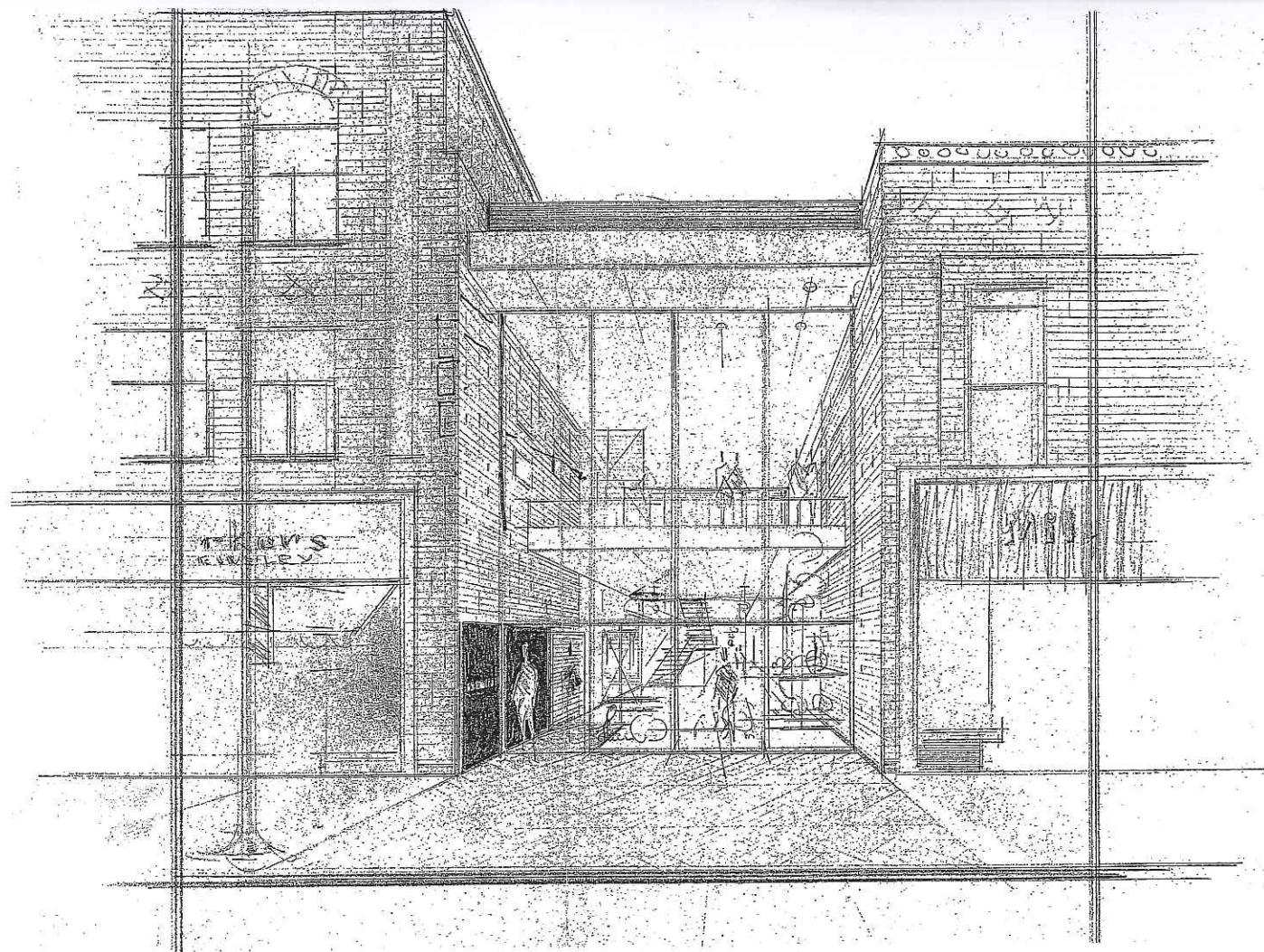
Right These elegant shelves for the window display at 113 Washington were supported by four vertical tension cables. The shelf heights could be adjusted to accommodate different merchandise.

I was bored. So I would walk over to the other part of the store and study the other things: briefcases and traveling bags."

The family moved to Lansing when Price's father opened his own Liebermann's store at 107 Washington in 1931, in the depths of the Great Depression, with capital from his uncle. That same year, Price began studying English at Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science, working in her father's store at the same time. "We had a trolley that went between Lansing and the college," she says. "I'd get down to Washington Avenue, jump off the trolley and run over to the store. I'd pick up a dust cloth and dust everything. I loved to handle the things. It was the cleanest store in the country. No customers to wait on. There was nothing else for me to do."



Photo by Denise Dykior Davis.



Collection of Don and Betty Price.

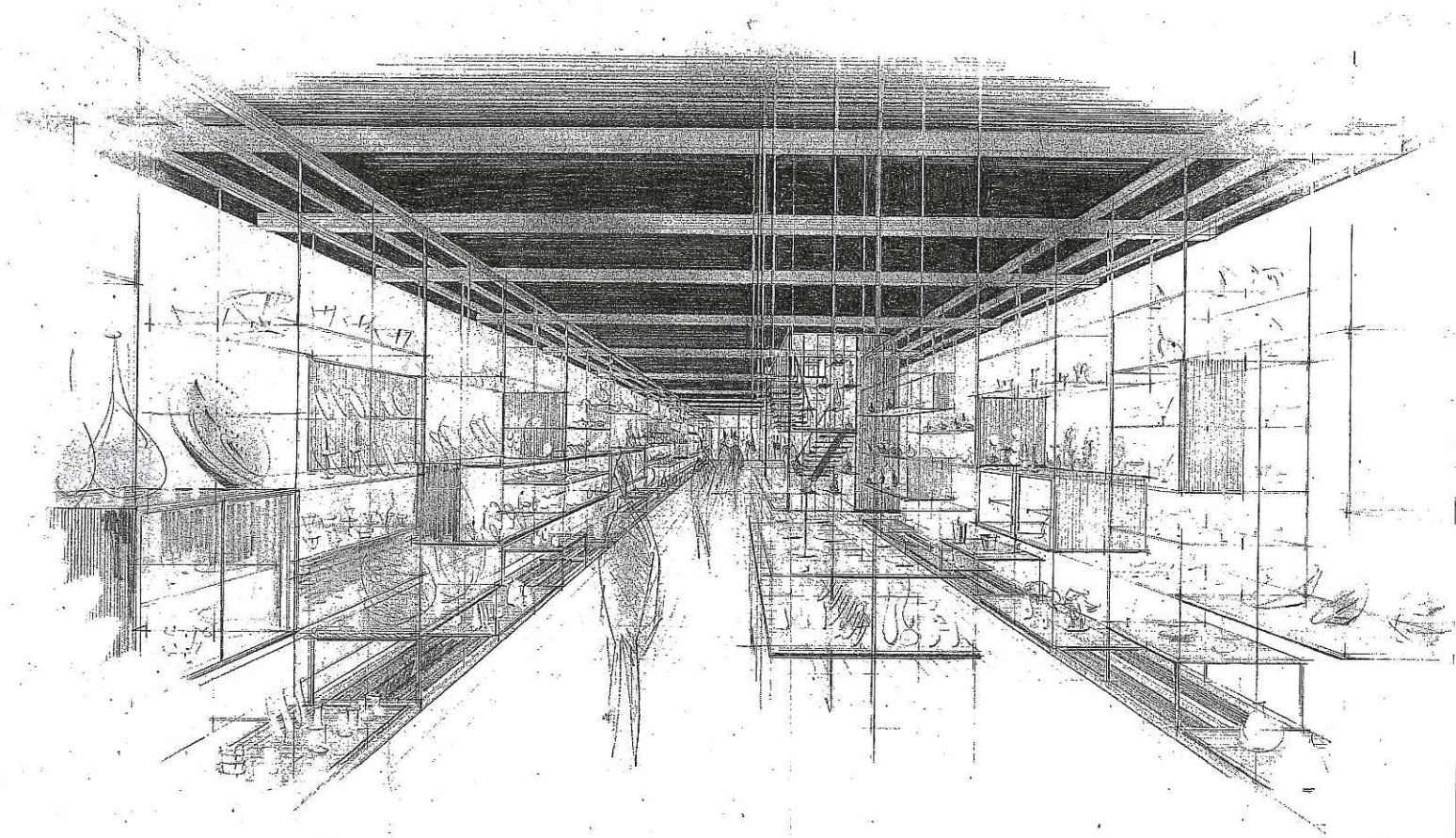
Above Inside the store at 113 Washington, Nelson placed his CSS shelving against a richly patterned slate wall.

Top Nelson's design for the storefront of Liebermann's at 113 Washington, drawn by Robert Fymat for George Nelson Associates, 1964.

Moving to Modern

Business slowly improved as the Depression waned. Price joined the business full-time and was soon promoted from duster to buyer. Even at 22, she relied on her own taste in choosing items for the store. "I lived with antiques all my life, but when I saw good contemporary things, I knew that's what I loved," she says. "When we'd go to a luggage show in New York City, there'd usually be a gift show in the same hotel. There was one very good company, Raymor, owned by a man named Irving Richards. He was always my first stop. I purchased the Russel Wright *American Modern* dinnerware from them. We were one of the first ones in the country to have it. Back in Lansing, I'd run down the street to Mills Dry Goods, take some of the dinnerware with me and pick out tablecloths to show with my Russel Wright — textured ones, not plain linen. If you put the Russel Wright on a good color and didn't mix it up — I didn't do a pink dish next to a yellow dish — it was easy to sell." Soon the luggage store was selling not only china, but also jewelry, lamps, magazine racks and other items small enough to fit into the part of the store Price called her "gift area." "I only bought things I wanted for myself," she says. "My dad didn't complain or criticize me, because whatever I bought, I sold."

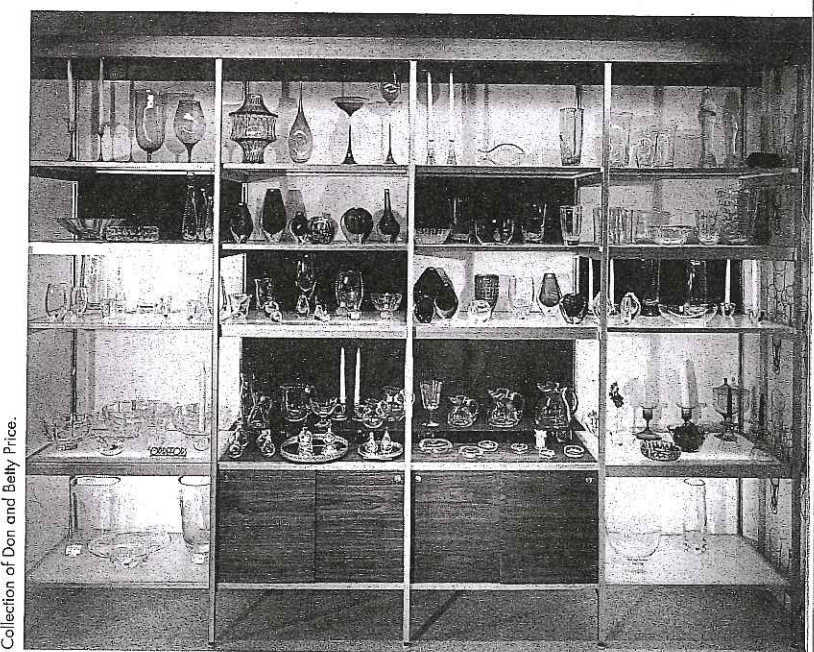
In 1938, Price's father gave her half of the lower floor. She featured Russel Wright's 1935 *American Modern* furniture line and his 1935 *Oceana* wood accessories among the gift items and dinnerware. "We sold hundreds of Russel Wright aluminum bun warmers," Price says. "They sold like hotcakes." Later that year, Betty Boettcher married Don Price, an assistant to Edsel Ford,



son of Henry Ford and head of the Ford Motor Company. "Don didn't know a thing about the retail business," says Price, but he had already begun to appreciate modernist design through working for Ford. Edsel Ford, a trustee of the fledgling Museum of Modern Art in New York, was a dedicated modernist, who hired Diego Rivera to paint murals and Walter Dorwin Teague to remodel his home, and insisted on contemporary furniture and accessories at his office. "The design in the offices was superb," recalls Price. "Don and I saw design there that we didn't see anywhere else." The ultra-modern Rotunda, designed by Albert Kahn for the Ford Pavilion at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair and later relocated to Dearborn, Michigan, was a commanding presence at Ford headquarters where Don Price worked.

Price's standards for Liebermann's were uncompromising, but never parochial. Around 1940, she began purchasing items from Madame Takahashi, a San Francisco firm that imported objets d'art from Japan and elsewhere in Asia, and ceramics developed as part of Russel Wright's American-Way project. Wright developed American-Way to demonstrate that modernist design was compatible with American culture and, equally important, that American craftsmanship could be combined with technology to produce goods that were both affordable and aesthetically pleasing.

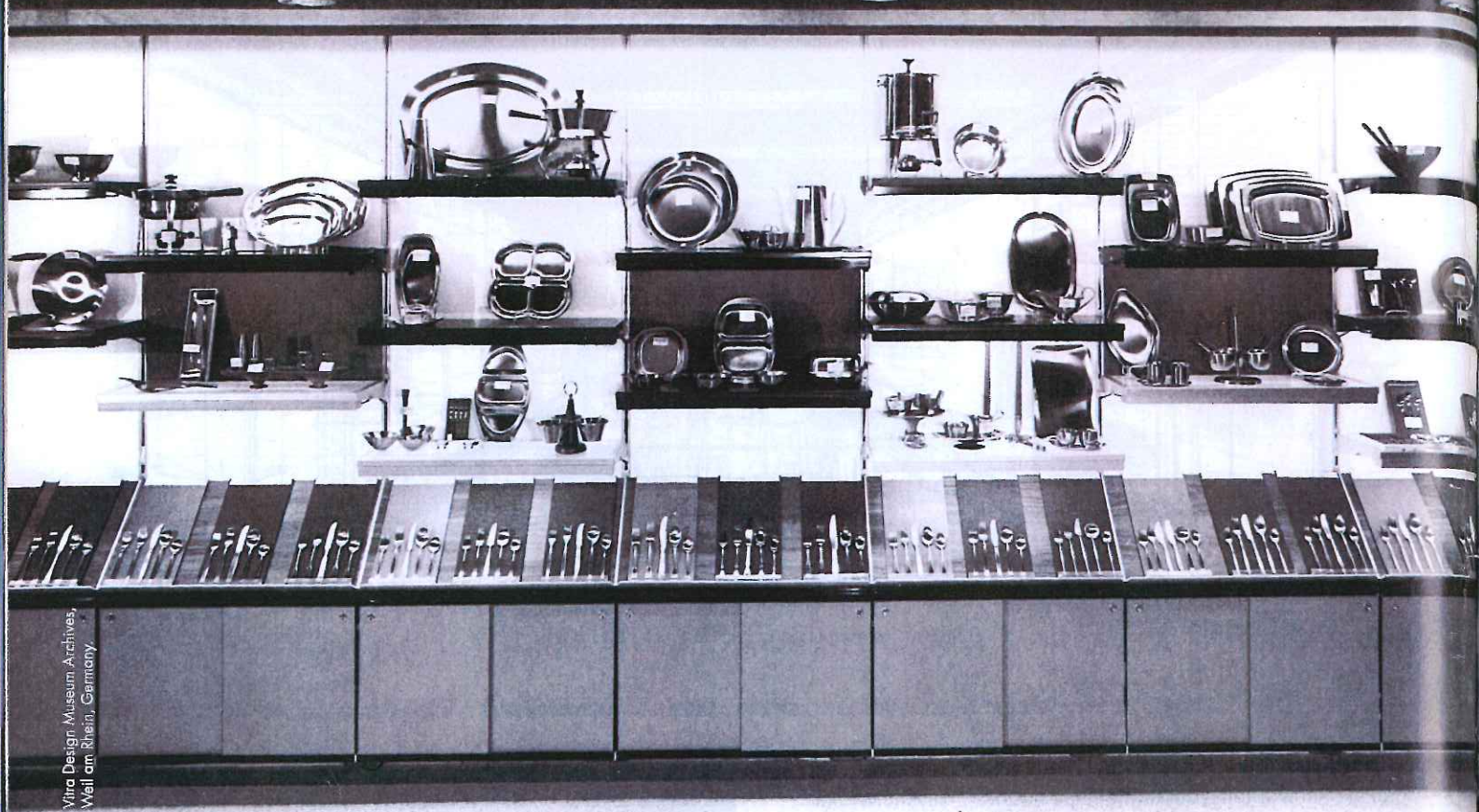
On a buying trip to New York City in 1940, Price saw the MoMA exhibition "Organic Design in Home Furnishings," which featured the work of Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen. She was already familiar with the work of both from her visits to the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, only 90 miles from Lansing. Frank Lloyd Wright's Goetsch-Winkler House, another major influence, was even closer, in nearby Okemos.



Collection of Don and Betty Price.

Above Swedish glassware, displayed here on Nelson's CSS shelving, was among the modernist products that Betty Price sold at the store.

Top Concept drawing of Liebermann's at 113 Washington by Robert Fymat for George Nelson Associates, 1964.



Vitra Design Museum Archives, Weil am Rhein, Germany



Collection of Don and Betty Price.

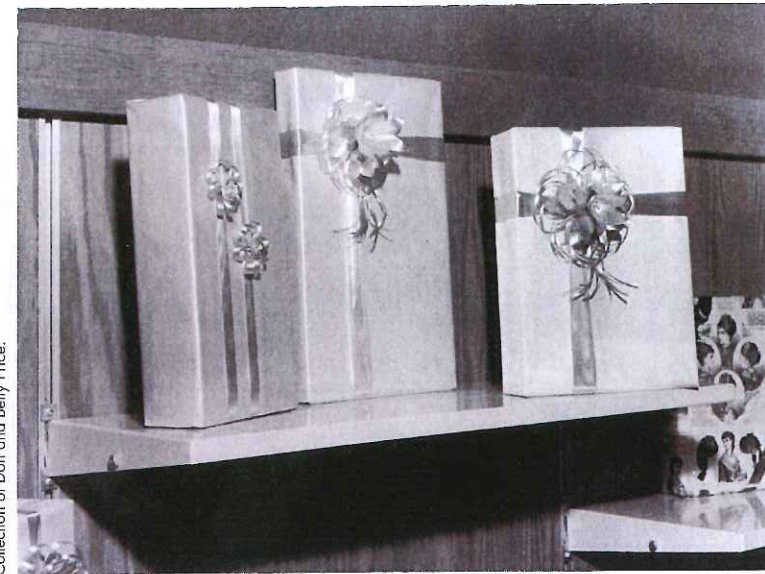
Above Under-shelf illumination was used with CSS shelving to enhance the display of WMF Fraser flatware and stainless steel.

Left This view through the display shelves and open staircase at 113 Washington highlights the design's focus on transparency and purity of form and careful attention to customers' experience of moving through the space.

Enter George Nelson

In 1947, Price began the first of many collaborations with George Nelson, when he designed the lower level of Liebermann's at 107 Washington, now dedicated entirely to gift merchandise and furniture chosen by Price. The luggage was moved upstairs. "My father said, 'You're pushing the luggage off the floor with your gifts,'" Price recalls. In 1952, Nelson drew up plans for the new luggage floor. These were not realized, but in 1965 he designed and outfitted a completely new Liebermann's at 113 Washington. The collaboration and friendship between the Prices and George Nelson continued well into the '70s, when Nelson entirely renovated Liebermann's at 107 Washington.

It was Betty's reading of the revolutionary 1945 book *Tomorrow's House*, by Nelson and Henry Wright, that led her to seek out George Nelson. Applying modernist concepts to solve problems of everyday life, the book introduced now-standard ideas like the storage wall and the family room. Before *Tomorrow's House*, Nelson was known



Collection of Don and Betty Price.

Above A Japanese-influenced approach to design and presentation, shared by George Nelson and Betty Price, is evident in Liebermann's carefully wrapped and decorated gift packages.

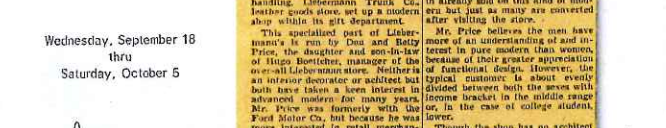
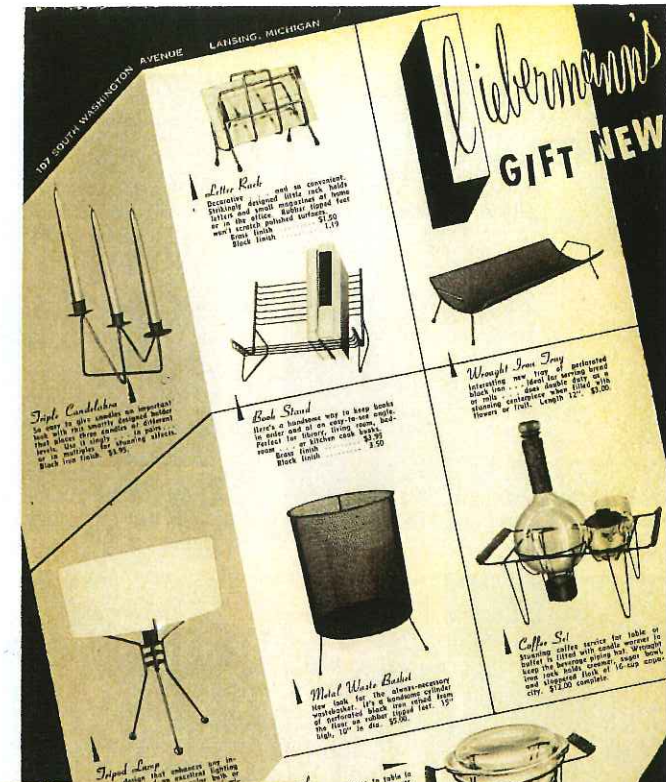
Right, top to bottom Liebermann's mail order gift catalogue, c. 1954, with a logo designed by George Nelson in 1952, offers modernist gift items; Invitation to the Special Exhibit and Sale of Japanese Arts and Crafts at Liebermann's, 1966; Article about Liebermann's selling furniture and accessories by Eames, Knoll, Nelson, Noguchi and Saarinen to the students and faculty at Michigan State College, 1949; a George Nelson-designed and autographed Christmas card, sent to the Prices in 1966.

primarily as a writer, but after its success, he was sought out as a designer, not only by Price, but also by Herman Miller, where he soon became the company's design director.

The 1947 blueprints for remodeling the lower floor of the store at 107 Washington, Nelson's first collaboration with the Prices, show shelving designed by Nelson and produced for him by Aluminum Extrusions Co. of Charlotte, Michigan. He would later license the design to Herman Miller as the *Omni* modular shelving unit. An article from the 1947 *Lansing State Journal* about Liebermann's new gift floor refers to its "modern shelves"; it is likely the first time this shelving was used in a store. Nelson also designed indirect lighting for the store, produced for him by Gotham Lighting of New York.

In the late 1940s, many of Liebermann's customers were young faculty or married students from Michigan State University. Some were already committed modernists; others discovered the style at Price's store. Price, optimistic about the future, felt in 1949 that "pure modern" was then "just in its infancy." Like Russel Wright, Price believed that modernist design should not merely be a European import for the avant-garde, but rather an integral part of middle-class American culture. She kept a large range of furniture and lighting designs from Knoll and by designers such as Saarinen, Eames, Nelson and Isamu Noguchi, on display and offered Russel Wright's *Casual* china by Iroquois, Edith Heath's *Classic Coupe* stoneware and *Chemex* coffeemakers to her mid-Michigan customer base and by mail order to customers around the country.

George Nelson took a personal interest in Price's store, suggesting a redesign in 1952 (never realized) and taking the initiative to redesign



All collection of Don and Betty Price.



Vitra Design Museum Archives, Weil am Rhein, Germany.

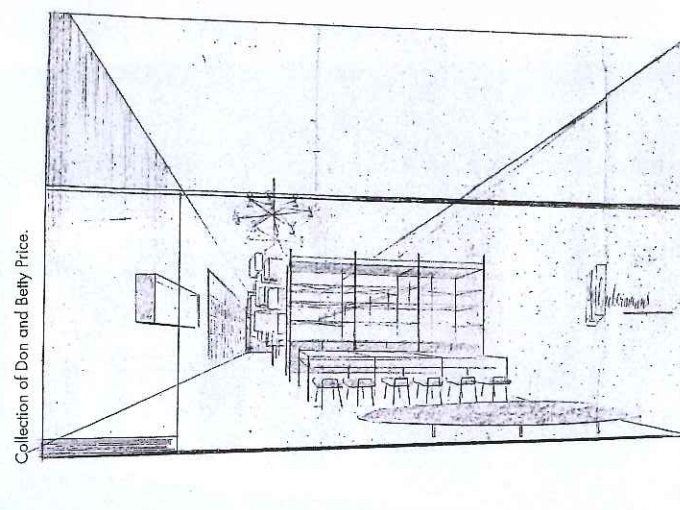


Lansing State Journal.

Above Original exterior of Liebermann's luggage store at 107 Washington, c. 1946, before its remodel by George Nelson. Betty Price began her career of selling modernist design on the lower level of this store.

Top, left Nelson remodeled the façade of Liebermann's at 107 Washington in 1972, inserting a large recessed L that was dramatically illuminated at night.

Top, right Concept drawing by George Nelson from 1952 for the remodel of the 107 Washington store (never realized).



Collection of Don and Betty Price.

the Liebermann logo, simply because he didn't like the old one. "He was always gracious even when he looked at something like our logo and probably thought it was awful," recalls Price. "He would never say it. He was always a gentleman."

Finally, Price was able to commission Nelson to design an entire store when she opened the new Liebermann's at 113 Washington in 1965; it remains the only retail store that George Nelson ever designed. The cost for his design services and trips to Lansing, and for Herman Miller fixtures, interior and exterior materials and construction work came in at the then staggering sum of \$25,774.99.

"He came to the 107 store with us and watched us interact with the customers," says Price. "In a sense, we were training him in the retail business. George was learning a lot from us and we were learning a lot from him. He enjoyed it immensely, and he wasn't in a hurry to leave. He'd spend the day downtown, then he'd come home with us for dinner."

The Prices worked with Nelson and his assistant, Robert Fymat, for three years on 113 Washington from conception to execution. "George would spend the night with us and we'd talk all evening," says Price. "George would lie down on the floor, curled up next to Don, who would always sit in the Eames lounge chair. The floors were warm because we had radiant heat. Don would smoke his pipe and George would have his cigarette. I would get tired and go to bed. He and Don would be up most of the night, talking about everything under the sun — politics, you name it."

For the entrance of the store, Nelson designed a dramatic façade of four 22-foot-high glass panels, set back about four feet from the sidewalk, with slate walls on either side of the window-display area. The window-display shelves were held with a tension system of four vertical cables; the shelves' heights could be adjusted to accommodate variously sized merchandise, allowing objects to be replaced easily without changing the whole display. Following Nelson's conviction that a store's identity should be conveyed by the architecture, the signage was purposely low-key, only about two feet high and placed at eye level.

Inside, a balcony was set back about eight feet from the entrance, accessed by a large, open staircase. Price and Nelson, both drawn to Japanese aesthetics, decided to turn the potential dead space under the stairs into a Japanese garden, with an arrangement of rocks, small stones and unusual plants. To display the Rosenthal line of dinnerware, accessories and giftware, Nelson designed a Rosenthal Studio on the first floor.

Courtesy Capital Area District Library, Ingham County, Michigan.



Left Washington Avenue in Lansing, c. 1956, showing the original Liebermann's store at number 107.

Below Betty Price in 2010 in the living room of her modernist East Lansing, Michigan home, designed in 1946 by architect Ken Black.



Photo courtesy of City Pulse, Lansing, Michigan; collection of Don and Betty Price.

Price wanted the simplest, most effective lighting available, settling on Finnish designer Tapio Wirkkala's elegant, geometric WIR incandescent bulb designs for Raymor. Ranging from slim to squatty, they were installed using custom-made can lighting fixtures from Gotham. In one of the first applications of Nelson's Comprehensive Storage System shelving (CSS), designed for Herman Miller, Nelson cantilevered CSS tracks from the wall, so the shelf height could be adjusted to accommodate any size merchandise. Herman Miller, by then Nelson's main manufacturer, would send Japanese tour buses from Zeeland, Michigan, to Lansing on a regular basis to see the store's unique design features.

Displays of gifts, china and accessories for the home, and their placement in relation to furniture groupings, were an extension of Price's interest in the Japanese aesthetic of subtly elegant presentation, an important part of her modernist approach. Liebermann's carried Japanese imports and Japanese-influenced items from the very beginning, from tatami mats to Noguchi's *Akari* lamps and Nelson's *Bubble* lamps, themselves influenced by Japanese paper lanterns. Gift packages from Liebermann's were almost too beautifully wrapped to open. Betty's son, Tom, has saved a 1969 edition of *How to Wrap Five Eggs: Japanese Design in Original Packaging*, by Hideyuki Oka with an introduction by George Nelson, a work that expresses the philosophy of presentation of both Nelson and Price. In his introduction, Nelson affirms his appreciation for "a way of life, a universal sensibility carried through all objects down to the smallest, most inconsequential, and ephemeral."

George Nelson's last project for Liebermann's came in 1972, when he renovated the façade and interior of the luggage store at 107 Washington, creating a long, narrow, mirrored space lined with display cases rising to the ceiling above storage cases, resulting in a space that seemed much wider than it actually was. He placed freestanding illuminated glass kiosks around the store for display that could be viewed from four

sides. A large recessed L, prominently featured on the front of the façade, illuminated the building at night.

The stores at 107 and 113 Washington closed in 1990. Through her work at Liebermann's for more than five decades, Betty Price helped spread an understanding and appreciation of modernist design throughout Michigan, the Midwest and beyond. "There weren't that many women in the retail business back then, but it never occurred to me that I shouldn't be there," she says. "And no one said to me that I was in the wrong place, that I should be at home raising my children." She never doubted the importance of what she was doing and she loved every minute of it.

Sandra Seaton is a playwright and librettist based in Michigan. Her recent work includes the plays *Music History* and *A Bed Made In Heaven*, and the solo opera *From the Diary of Sally Hemings*, a collaboration with composer William Bolcom.