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CARING FOR MID-CENTURY MODERN FURNITURE

By Yuri Yanchyshyn, Principal and Senior Conservator, Period Furniture Conservation, LLC

Mid-century modern furniture is in demand by collectors, who prize its typically sleek aesthetic and diversity of styles. But furniture from this era comes with some innate issues, due to the large number of nontraditional materials used in its creation. Plastics, manufactured woods, rubber materials and various metals all present owners with specific challenges. This thumbnail guide will help you preserve and enjoy your collection—and its value.

Examination

Start with structural stability. Check to make sure all the joints are tight and the connections secure. Look for loose parts and places where veneers may be detaching from the sub-surface.

Next, look for corrosion, deterioration and degradation. High humidity, airborne pollutants, sunlight, water and everyday use each take a toll.

- Metals should have an even tone, with no areas of discoloration or pitting.
- Rubber should be sleekly contoured, with no cracks or deformities.
- Plastics should be sound, without cracks or crazing, cloudiness or discoloration.
- Finishes should be without blisters, abrasions, evident water damage or bleaching due to sunlight.
- Fabrics should be sound, with minimal discoloration and fraying around the edges.

Maintenance

While some wear and tear is inevitable, you can take steps to prevent unnecessary deterioration.

- Humidity should be maintained at a stable 40-50% level.
- Lighting should be even and not harsh. Particularly prevent exposure to direct sunlight.



- Cleaning should be done in two stages. If the surfaces are stable, gently brush off dust and grit. The second stage is best left to conservators, since household cleaners and polishers are far too aggressive, and can do more harm than good.

The conservators at Period Furniture Conservation would be pleased to examine any historic furniture objects in your collection to review condition and to offer recommendations for their care.

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