

*R. Hartstone*

# House Beautiful



*Two Bedrooms  
Shown in Color*

# AN APARTMENT IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY MANNER

Photographs by Old Masters Studio, Inc.



*In a Penthouse decorated  
by Gilbert Rohde*

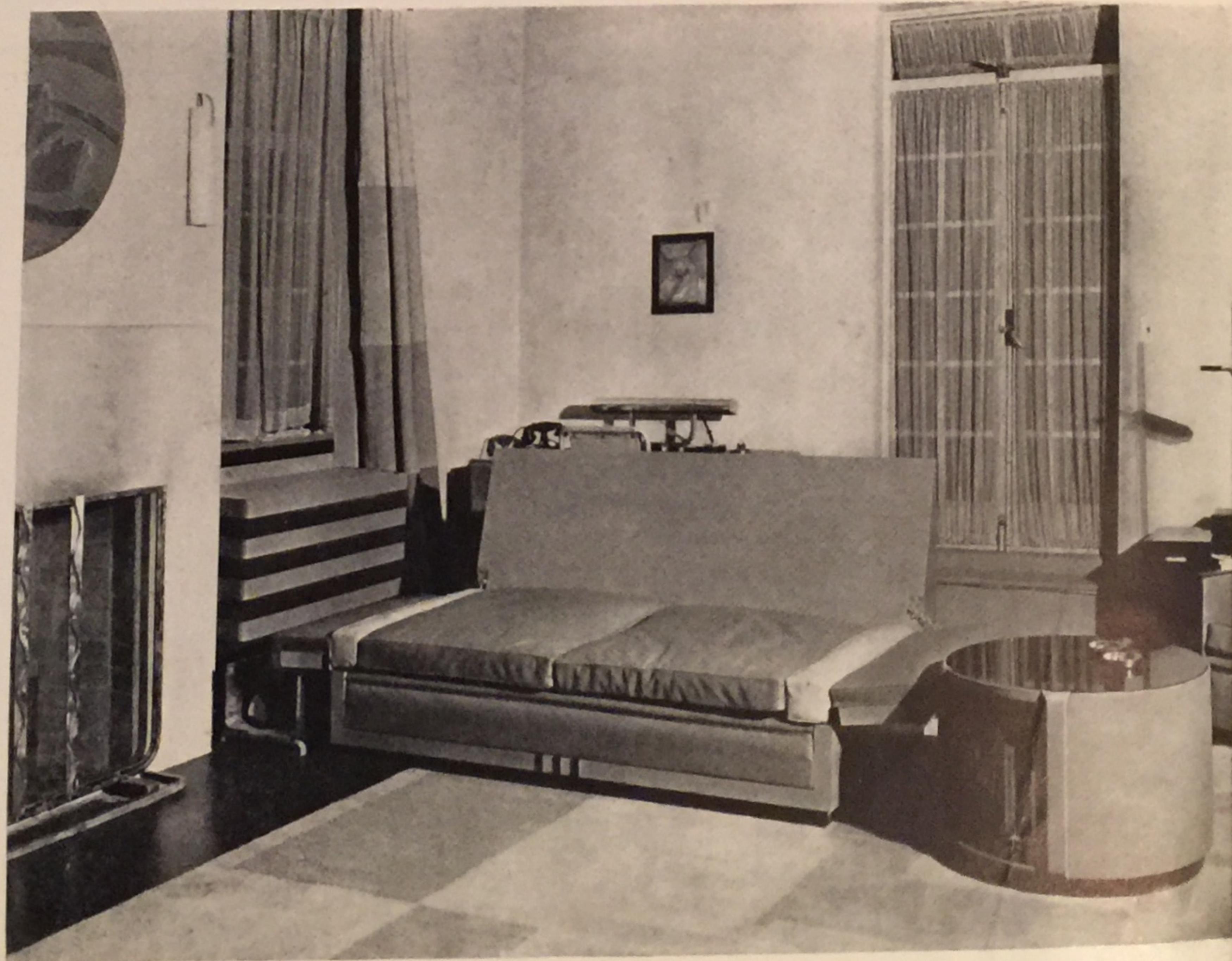
BY  
HELEN SPRACKLING

SUPPLEMENTING the barewood furniture are a few pieces of black lacquer like this chest, which has a black glass top and handles of chromium. The mirror above has brass, copper, and Monel metal frame and decorations

THE COUCH, it was specified, must not be too large and yet must be usable for sleeping. The illustration below shows it with the ends extended for this purpose. The low round table too plays a dual rôle, for when it revolves it discloses other objects than books

WHAT could be more fitting than that a penthouse apartment should be decorated in the modern decorative manner! A direct result of new building laws, built of steel that rears itself overnight, fireproof, and equipped with every convenience, it comes into being without benefit of tradition and is what it is solely and alone through the exigencies of modern architectural design, engineering, and industrial science. Where, then, a more normal background for the structural ideas of the interior architect, a setting more indigenous to the conceptions of the contemporary decorative artist?

The penthouse has much the same peculiar features as has every other modern apartment of recent building, features that are rapidly becoming stereotyped in contemporary apartment-house design and are peculiar only as they differ from the traditional ideas and arrangement of the average home — the entrance hall and foyer without windows, the unbalanced arrangement of doors, small and narrow rooms with only one window, large rooms with bare ceilings unrelieved by cornice or moulding, and gaunt wall spaces unmodified by softening line of trim or extenuating shadow. It has one great and rare advantage, — rare to the urban dweller, — it is flooded with light; at night one may count the stars. If these features of the modern apartment are a challenge and a stimulus to the contemporary artist, it is also his premise that he take structural advantage and dis-

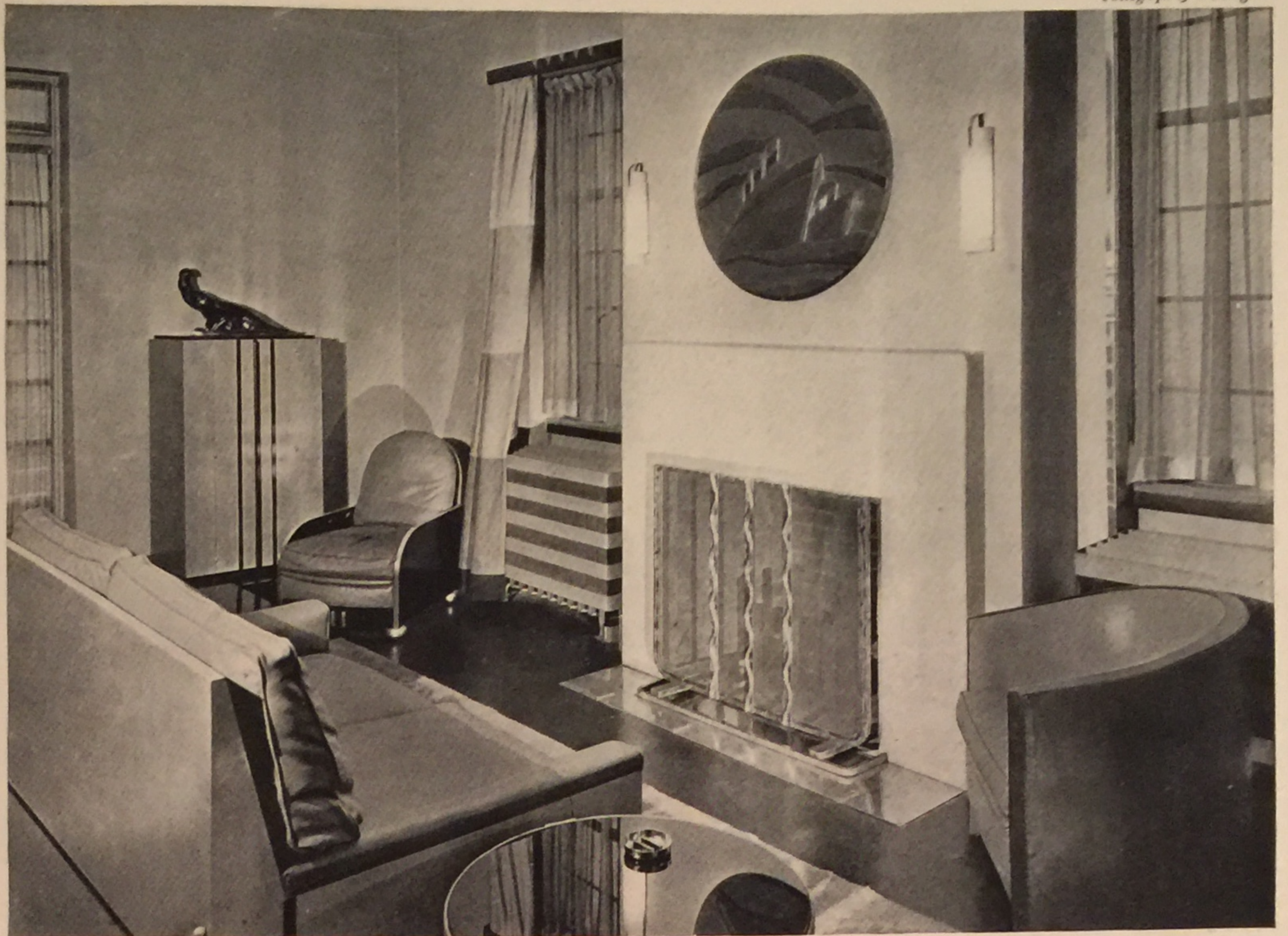


advantage alike, incorporate them in the fundamentals of his scheme, and relate them in design and rhythm to the life and personality of the occupant. In proportion as he interprets the principles of good modern design and his imagination clothes them with interest is he successful in coupling art with life itself.

This penthouse apartment on Sheridan Square in the Greenwich Village section of New York is quite typical of its kind, neither presenting any more difficulties than the average nor offering any particularly facile means to a decorative end. It is small, planned for a bachelor occupant (that term

Photograph by Worsinger

GRAY, black, and red-orange are the colors used in the room, but all are heightened by the gleam of metal and glass, which are used freely



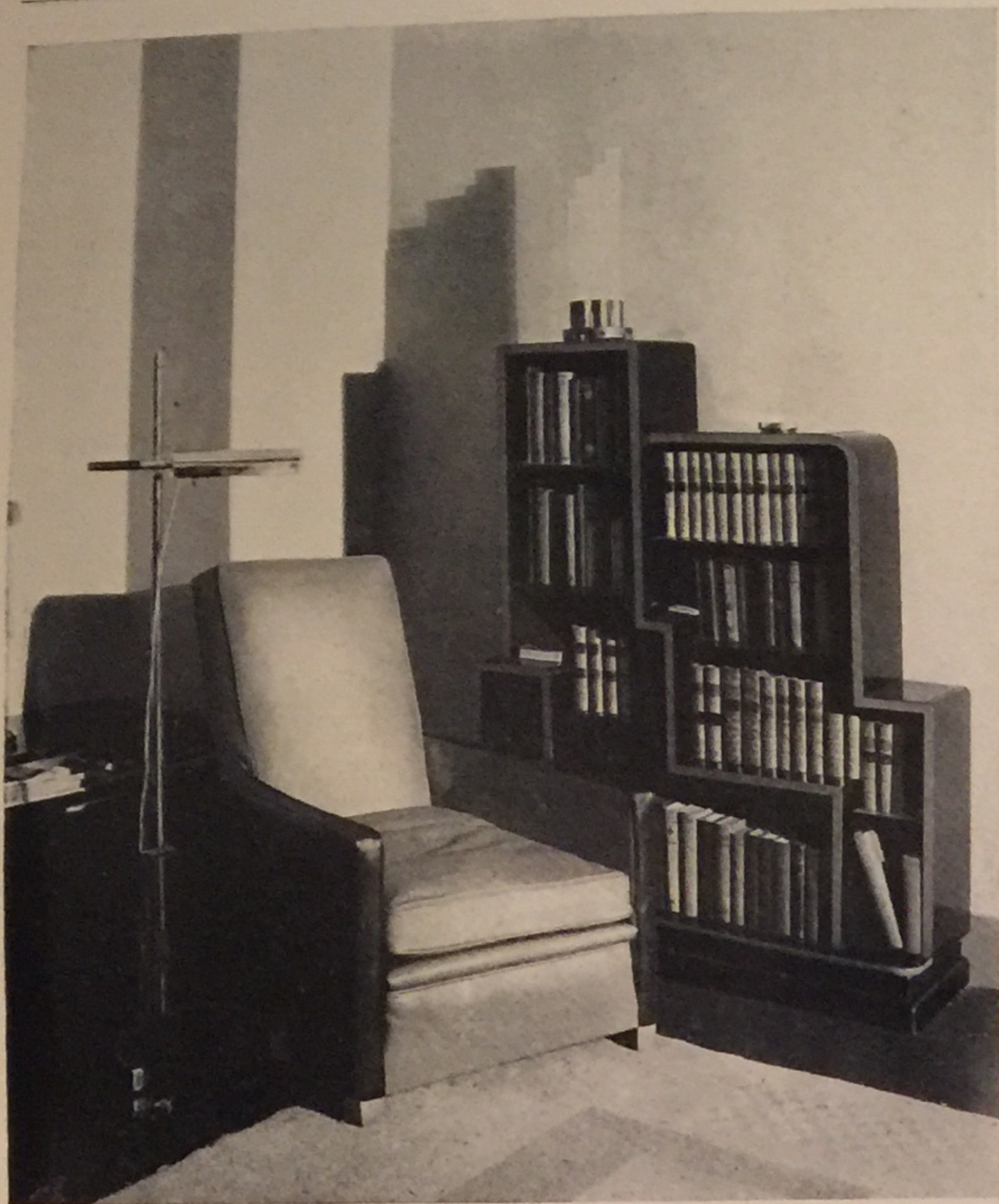
THE FIRE SCREEN of wrought iron, copper, and brass, mounted on a movable frame but with doors that open; the radio cabinet, which expresses something of the mechanical precision of this modern miracle; and the desk of hawthorn, chromium plate, and orange fabrikoid, are all newly adapted to function

Photograph by Worsinger



being, in the modern sense, male or female), and consists, beside its entrance, of one large living-room, a small bedroom, a small but luxurious bathroom, three capacious closets, and an infinitesimal but amazingly complete kitchenette. It is very light; the walls have throughout been finished a soft gray with ivory-colored ceilings, thus preventing any disagreeable glare. The woodwork where it is used is ivory, matching the ceilings. Over fireproof floors of concrete has been laid black linoleum, soft in tone and waxed in appearance.

High above the busy hum of the little square below, the windows of the apartment look chiefly to the west and follow the lines of swiftly moving traffic down Seventh Avenue. The afternoon sun pours in through openings that form an ever-changing gallery of sky pictures as they frame the mauve colorings of the softening twilight, the lone aviator of the evening air mail as he crosses Manhattan, or the mobile-hued moods of the setting sun. In the evening the pageant of city lights spreads out below and strings of twinkling jewels glide up and down the Avenue. A step up both right and left of the living-room, and there are French doors leading on either side to wind-swept terraces and the seething, shifting panorama of the city. Gilbert Rohde, who decorated this apartment, in its execution bore three things in mind: its structure, its setting, and its occupant — a man of cosmopolitan taste and culture. It is inevitable then that this should be expressed in what is, on further analysis, excellent twentieth-century style.



THE STEP-BACK BOOKCASE of black lacquer casts an architectural shadow on the wall. On the right is the radio cabinet open, disclosing a phonograph as well and an enclosed light

The approach to the apartment has an element of surprise. Borne aloft in the elevator to realms above, one most naturally expects to be transported to pleasant sunny regions and broad expanses of blue sky. That was our subconscious thought on the occasion of our first visit to the apartment. Instead we were released in the common foyer of the top floor of the building. Sonorous sounds from an excellent radio and an imposing array of bright red doors greeted us. One door, however, marked 'tower' seemed promising. As it opened to our ring we found ourselves on the threshold of a tiny hall and but a step or two from a stairway which curved and wound itself out of sight. On the right stood a cane and umbrella stand, modern in design and topped with a tubular lamp of frosted glass. Directly in front of us and at the foot of the stairs a fine mirror framed in a narrow band of copper created the illusion of distance.

THIS stairway is one of the interesting features of the apartment. Surrounded by stucco walls, it was originally a bare, fireproof flight of steps with granite treads, gray metal risers, and an uninteresting iron railing. Under Mr. Rohde's guiding hand the iron railing was transformed into a wall-like balustrade of stucco matching the tone and texture of the walls. Each stair riser was painted Chinese red, a fine color contrast to the warm natural hues of the plastered walls. One has only to mount a little way before coming on a level with the lower part of the lighting fixture. Dropped deep into the nar-

row stair well on rods of chromium-plated metal nine feet long are five large disks of frosted glass hung one above the other, about a foot apart. A cluster of small bulbs under all but the bottom plate are not concealed, but contribute to the design of this modern lantern which, when lighted, suffuses both upper and lower hall with a soft white light. At the top of the stairs a circular foyer presents several doorways and forms a nucleus around which cluster the other rooms of the apartment. On the right an arched opening frames the sunshine and color of an unusual and attractive living-room.

WHEN we step to the doorway we find a large capacious room with windows on three sides letting in an abundance of light. We realize at once that this very light permits the general color scheme of gray, black, and red-orange, which in a less glowing room might be cold in spite of the vivid hue. Complete, the room is an excellent example of the increasing tendency of modern interior art toward softer neutralized tones with the use of strong color as an emphasizing note to the refinement of the predominating hues. Here Mr. Rohde has depended upon shade and texture rather than form to create his interest. The light gray of the walls, the deeper silver tones of the furniture, interspersed and touched with black deepening into the basic solidity of the black floor, the modulated whole pierced with shafts of red-orange, the reflecting brilliance of black glass and the play of copper, brass, and aluminum present a truly modern idea.

As the picture resolves itself into detail it is

the furniture which first commands attention. The tall radio cabinet, the desk, and the davenport are silvery gray which, though obviously of wood, has a metallic quality in its finish. Close investigation reveals that it is hawthorn, which in more literal terms is dyed sycamore or birch, with aluminum powder rubbed into it. Hawthorn, while beautiful when new, eventually turns yellow under the steady rays of light. It is interesting to note right here that it was originally used for making imitation antiques because of this very fact. Enough aluminum powder may be rubbed in to counteract this yellowing process, which will yet allow the grain to show through. Of the three pieces in this finish the radio cabinet stands forth in distinguished beauty. Utterly simple in form, but of well-proportioned line, it allows its decoration to proceed from the material itself — the grain of the wood, the small bullet hinges of chromium plate, three straight bands of black ebony. (This motif of triple lines is a favored one and appears again and again in Mr. Rohde's work — in the triple metal supports of table or desk, on the fire screen, or as a brief decoration on the solid base of a chair or settee.) The base is of ebony and the top a slab of heavy black glass. The black pottery pheasant with its graceful sweep of line has found a befitting perch. The doors of the cabinet open in the centre to reveal the combination radio and phonograph with the added convenience of a self-contained light.

If Mr. Rohde has a hobby, it is designing desks. The basis (Continued on page 528)

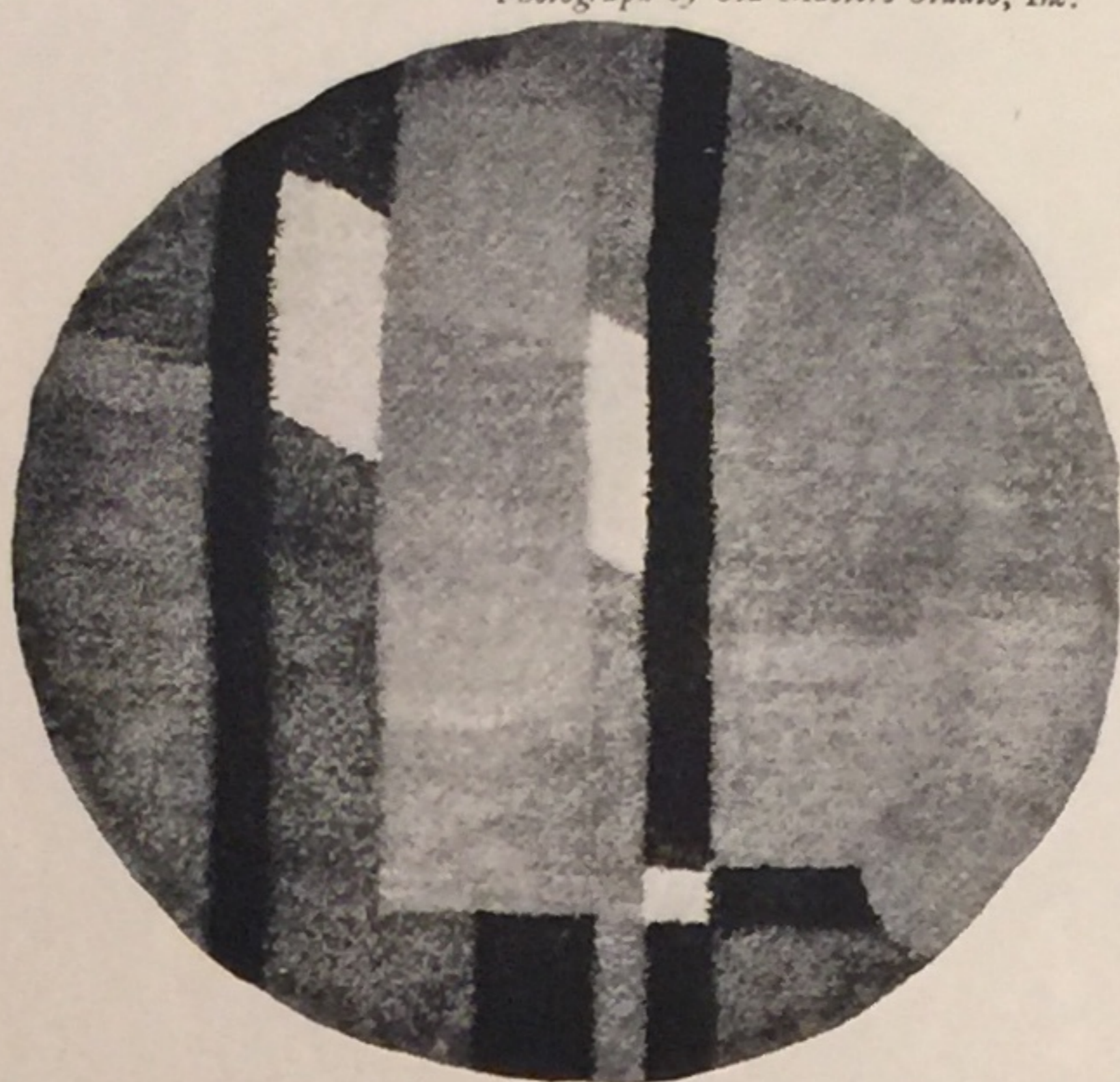
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of all his design always is functional need, but in no piece of furniture is it more splendidly apparent than in his desks. This one is no exception. Flat-topped, its writing surface covered with red-orange fabrikoid, its silver harewood section of drawers is founded on an ebony base with the black note repeated again in the handles. On the right, triple chromium-plated legs support the top in a very decorative manner.

It is characteristic of Mr. Rohde's work that he met the requirements of design in a simple straightforward fashion without eccentricities of form or attempt to be 'different.' This couch is sixty inches long and thirty-six inches deep. To fulfill its need the cushions of the back are removed, the arms drop, held in place by heavy chains, and a full-length bed of comfortable width is the result.

*Photograph by Old Masters Studio, Inc.*



*THIS RUG, 40" in diameter, in gray, black, vermilion, and dark maroon, has been especially designed for the living-room floor*

The lamp is also of chromium plate with a long adjustable shade which conceals three tubular bulbs. This has a base of black glass which incorporates the base of the fountain pen and the top of the blotter block in its design. If outwardly the desk presents a sleek, well-ordered appearance, it is because, within, every little item has been provided for in a convenient and accessible way. The top drawer is divided to accommodate a very complete supply of all the little necessary details and what not. In one drawer there is a removable card index; another has a standard letter-file compartment.

The settee has a frame of harewood combined with ebony. Its large cushions are upholstered in gray leather. Here again we find comfort and need an outstanding part of its design; the owner stipulated that the couch be not too long, yet so arranged that when necessary it could be used for sleeping. As Mr. Rohde himself says: 'A new utility will naturally produce an outward form different from any other; that is the design. There can be more than one form to fulfill this need, but it must be good form. The designer will clothe that form according to his ability as an artist.'

Supplementing the harewood furniture are a few pieces of black lacquer: a low magazine stand, bookshelves of skyscraper design which cast an architectural shadow upon the wall, and a chest of drawers which is as fine an example of twentieth-century cabinetwork as one could wish to find. Comprehensible in design and with characteristic restraint of detail, it achieves dignity and beauty through exquisite form and the satinlike texture of its finish. It is topped with black glass; chromium plate in a dull finish forms the handles and the protective-decorative pieces at the base. Four comfortable armchairs upholstered in black and gray leather are a definitely masculine note and form the color median between the gray of the harewood and the nightlike depths of the lacquer. One of the chairs varies the rhythm slightly; although upholstered in gray leather, its frame is of black lacquer instead of black leather and the base black bakelite which cannot be marred. All the chairs have chromium-plated feet.

The black and gray note is further emphasized in the highly ornamental and attractively useful small incidental tables which Mr. Rohde designs so well. Two of

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them have bakelite tops on supports of chromium plate, one of these repeating the triple motif again. The third, topped with brilliant black glass, has three quarters of the side enclosed in gray leather. The open compartment is capacious and deep, capable of holding worthy tomes such as the dictionary, the world almanac, or outlines of economics — the solid foundation of any young man's library. But the

his name has appeared many times on the pages of this magazine. The metallic note of the chairs and the bright color of the fabricoid covering is picked up, repeated, and dramatically emphasized throughout the entire room. It appears in the chromium plate of the lamps and table supports, at the radiator and in the window trim, and as a dominating note at the mantel and fireplace which are the central architectural fea-

Photograph by Worsinger



IN THE MINUTE BEDROOM is a black lacquer bed edged with chromium. The reading light has a switch conveniently placed at the side. The curtains and bedspread are Nile green and gray

touch of a spring, — a secret, keyless lock, — and lo! two dozen glasses of suggestive size and shape turn slowly into view; again the touch of the spring and a *third* and very secret compartment is revealed, the contents of which would stimulate the most sluggish imagination. Suffice it to say that this 'Rotorette' of Gilbert Rohde's has a most ulterior motif of functional need as the basis of its design.

Into this blending of grays and black is thrown the sharp note of red-orange introduced into the scheme by the upholstery of the silver-like chairs of aluminum tubing which were designed and executed for Mr. Rohde by Walter Von Nessen. Mr. Von Nessen works exclusively in metal, and

tures of the room. The fire screen of wrought iron, copper, and brass was designed by Mr. Rohde. Simple in design, it is mounted on a movable frame, but has doors that open out, allowing easy access to the fire. Over the fireplace is a metal placque designed by Bernard Fischer and executed in Monel metal, brass, and copper. Mr. Fischer is at his best in the 'Queen of Hearts,' which hangs over the desk; layers of superimposed metal throw the head into high relief against a background of black bakelite. By this time the frame of the mirror over the black lacquer chest of drawers is readily recognizable as also Mr. Fischer's work. Here we stop a moment also to admire the highly decorative painting by Lesch, whose

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brilliant orange tree catches and holds the vivid color in the room.

One of the most original notes in the whole room is the metal trim which is on the inner side of both windows that flank the fireplace. A single heavy drapery of monk's cloth, graduating from light gray to black at the bottom, contributes a softening influence upon the otherwise severe lines of the window. The radiator prevented a similar drapery on the right-hand side, so Mr. Rohde has most dramatically added interest with this simple strip of copper, crossed at the bottom with strips of brass. The radiator covering, consisting simply of bands of gray painted metal, reduces the heat to no appreciable extent, but covers an unsightly object in a most modern manner.

It would not be a complete story if we did not mention the rug, which unfortunately was not quite finished at the time the interior photographs were taken. In the ancient principle of design, symbols had a literal interpretation. In working out the rug for this room, Mr. Rohde felt, as he later explained, 'that there ought to be some meaning to it.' As a consequence the initials of the owner, N. L., may be easily recognized in what seems to be at first glance merely an abstract geometrical pattern. Black, gray, maroon, orange, and white are artistically combined and woven into this room-sized rug.

We were just about to leave the apartment when through an open door in the hall we caught a glimpse of the minute bedroom.

Scarcely large enough to allow the photographer leeway for a picture, it yet packed some interesting points within its small dimensions. The furniture is black lacquer; the bed is low with its edges finished with bands of dull chromium plate. Beside the bed and the low stand visible, the only other piece in the room is a capacious chiffonier. To the structural interest of the furniture is added the color interest of the rayon material in Nile green and gray which forms the curtains and the bed covering. A black satin pillow trimmed with bands of silver cloth and a silver cord completes the bed. Below the window and at the head of the bed is a radiator which has been concealed with plaster board; to this has been fastened a reading light — the final word in comfort and convenience, which exacts no more effort from a tired and sleep-suffused brain to extinguish than moving the tiny switch on the wall beside the bed.

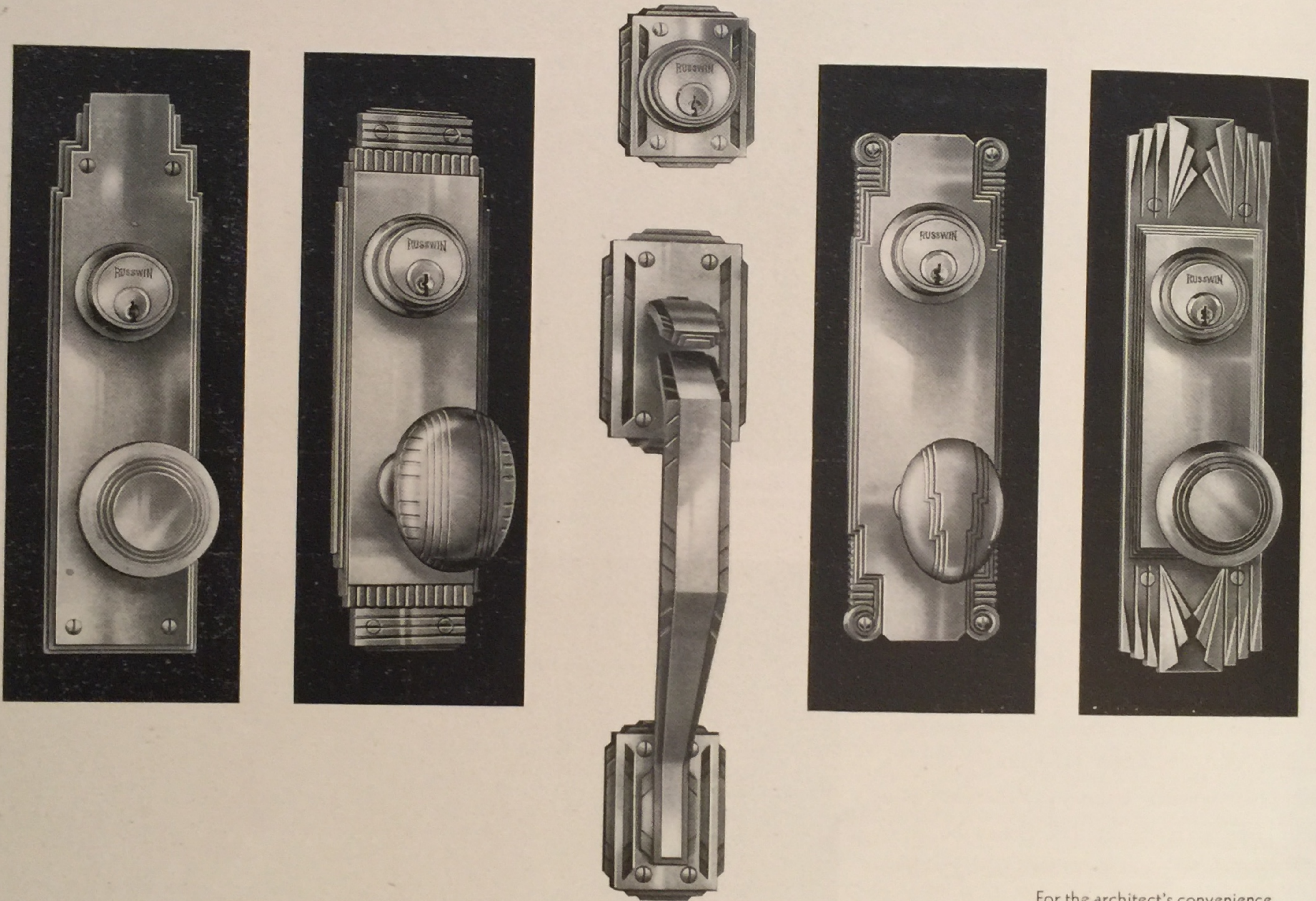
As we were about to descend the stairs we cast a final glance over the apartment. We saw again in its entirety the appropriateness of the structure and design of the interior decoration to the architectural qualities of the background. And we felt once more in Gilbert Rohde's interpretation of the situation — an interpretation firmly based on the fine principles of modern design, which are functional need, simplicity, and the resultant beauty of fine proportion and craftsmanship — that any other period of decoration would seem both incongruous and anachronistic.

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# MODERNISTIC

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