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House Beautiful



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MAURICE ADAMS is best known for his designs in figured walnut, the grain of the wood often forming the sole decorative feature of his furniture. This sideboard is typical of his best work, the grain of the walnut being emphasized by a base and handles of Massar ebony



ENGLISH DESIGN IN MODERN FURNITURE

*Illustrated by the Work of a Few of the Men who are
Outstanding in this Field*

BY LEN CHALONER

IT was inevitable in the wave of enthusiasm for modern furniture and decoration which invaded England a few years ago from the Continent that some confusion of standards and ideals should arise. In the rush for novelty and new ways of living, the designer was tempted to be 'clever' rather than original in any real sincerity, and much was hailed as representative of a new age that soon proved to be but a very transient vogue. The passing of time has allowed the work of a handful of men to emerge from this undergrowth and take its place as something that is really representative of the thought and feeling of the George V period and ways of living. Here in fact is furniture that will live not only to-day to give pleasure to the present generation, but will survive to be acquired as 'antiques' by their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for the beauty and sincerity of its design.

To those who visit England from across the Atlantic her greatest asset perhaps is the fact that she is the 'old' country,

with years of history and tradition behind her. It is not surprising therefore that English modern design reveals its debt to much of the best in its ancestry, although it is in

no sense anything but the work of vigorous creative minds and hands.

Perhaps most symbolic of this feeling is the fact that of the handful of designers mentioned, each contributing so different a share to modern period furniture, all have shown a profound harmony with their chosen material—wood. They have no less in common a sincerity of purpose that sends each along a path of individuality in the quest for expression. From this basic idea, and its unhurried working out in beauty of form and color, one is led to wonder how far the movement may in the light of history become comparable in its influence on art and craft to the work of William Morris.

In considering modern furniture design it is important to appreciate that in England, as in other countries, it is becoming more and more closely linked with the architecture of the home, and a few leading architects have distinguished themselves in the design of furniture. The development of built-in furniture is but part



AMONG THE YOUNGER DESIGNERS whose work is receiving increasing attention is Michael Dawn, who designed this walnut chest of drawers for a man's room

Dell and Wainwright



THE WORK OF S. CHERMAYEFF, though expressing the solidity and simplicity characteristic of the English school, shows marked Continental influence. He designed this desk of figured walnut and the metal floor standard

TYPICAL OF the work of S. Chermayeff is this room (below) which uses wood paneling and figured walnut with such striking effect

have marked individuality in his work, and each has contributed his special quota to what is now recognized as George V period furniture.

To Mr. Maurice Adams has been accorded recently the unusual honor of having a piece of his work acquired by the authorities of the South Kensington Museum. Too often such recognition only comes posthumously.

His work has evolved from a very close link with the traditional, and year after year those who have been in touch with it could watch the designer gradually freeing himself to achieve his highly distinctive and characteristic work of to-day. He is best known for his designs in figured walnut, one of which has been chosen for illustration, and in this the unbroken line and broad curves afford additional beauty to the grain of the wood, which, in the majority of instances, he uses as the sole decorative feature of his furniture. Mouldings of any kind are conspicuous for their absence, and dished edges only emphasize the dignified simplicity of semi-elliptical fronts to dressing tables, cupboards, or cabinets.

Mr. Adams's close sympathy with his material leads him to choose his wood first and then his design for this particular medium. Because we know most of his work in walnut, the process of his evolving

THIS GOLD DRESSING TABLE (below) was designed by J. Rowley, whose skillful use of laminated wood in combining colored lacquer or the grains of the wood itself has resulted in many original and beautiful pieces



and parcel of this architectural influence, but for the purposes of the present article designers have been chosen who have shown their ability primarily in movable furniture. It is always difficult to make a selection of a few names when good work is being done perhaps by a dozen, and the names have been arranged alphabetically to avoid any suggestion of comparison or relative merit. Each designer will be seen to

expression is most easily traceable in this furniture, but some of his designs in flame mahogany, with the grain of this beautiful wood as pillars of flame in the panels of wardrobe, bed, and dressing table, are certainly no less characteristic or fascinating in their appeal.

Mr. Serge Chermayeff is a naturalized Englishman who was educated at that most traditional of English public schools, Harrow.

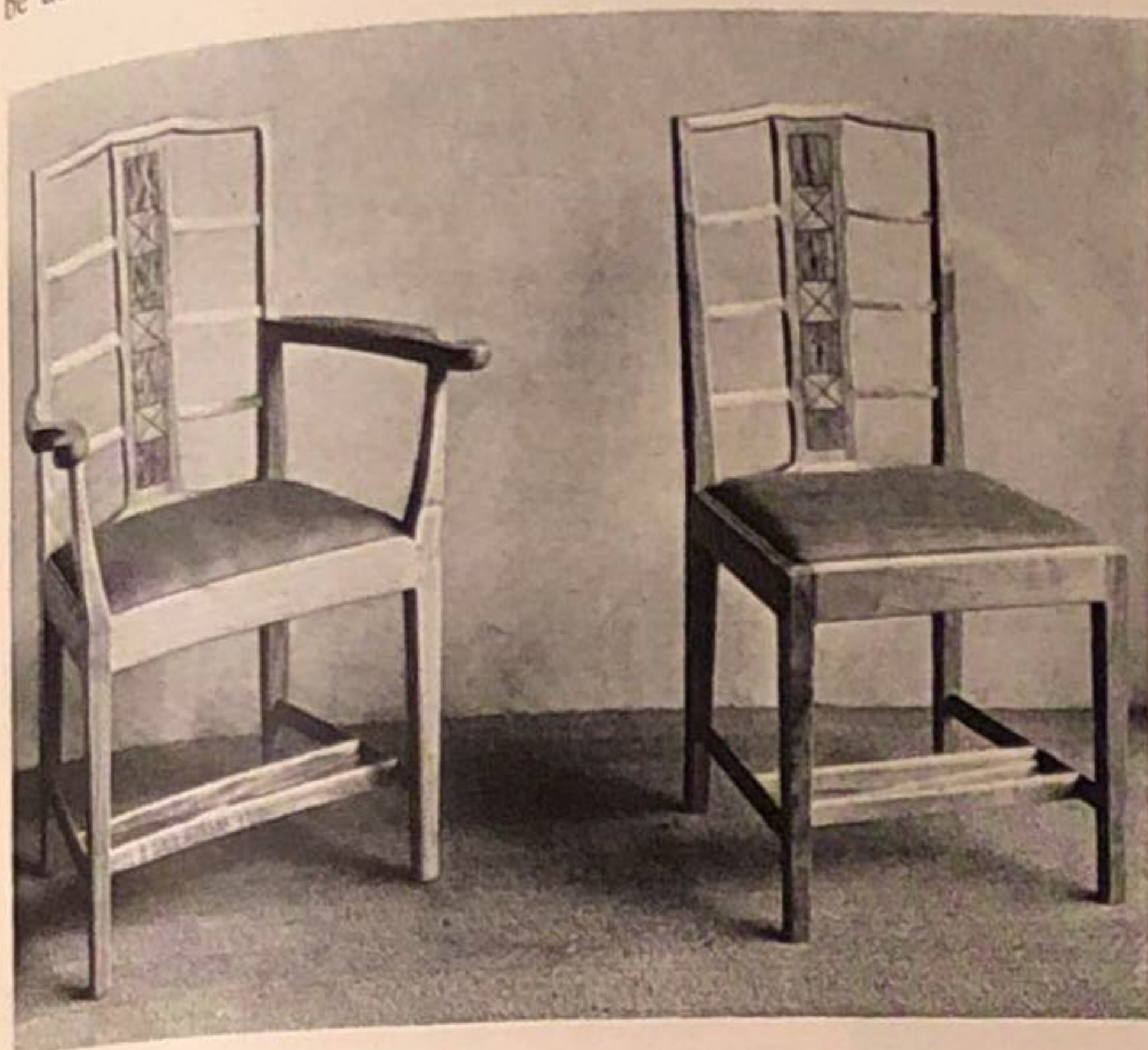
It is interesting to observe in work that is often strongly expressive of Continental influence a no less definite vein of the old English schools of thought, in solidity and simplicity of design. There can be no doubt that much of this feeling was absorbed quite unconsciously in those early school years.

If his Continental experience leads him to experiment with metal furniture, the illustrations taken of a London home show him at his best in a luxurious use of panels and walnut. On the more practical side it might be added that Mr. Chermayeff has shown

Mr. J. Rowley describes himself frankly as a 'rebel.' To him the source of inspiration for his work was the need and the material which urged him to create something different from that which had, in his own words, 'been done before.' Simplicity of form, made possible by the use of laminated wood, enabling the designer to make the utmost of colored lacquer or the grain of the wood, has been the outstanding feature of this designer's work. But Mr. Rowley's sense of color is not one of ordinary standards, and we should be doing him a grave injustice if this point

SIMPLE AND GRACEFUL, yet sturdy in construction, are these chairs designed by Gordon Russell, who founded the Gordon Russell workshops in Broadway

ANOTHER DESIGN (upper right) by Gordon Russell, illustrating his characteristic use of faceting, which gives distinction to the simplest pieces



peculiarly happily how furniture grouping may be accomplished with much saving of space if the right angles and measurements are adopted to make each item of furniture in a room able, if required, to stand flush against its neighbor as a unit piece. The making of a fireside circle with settee, odd tables, and chairs is no longer done at the expense of the appearance of the room.

Mr. Michael Dawn is among the younger designers whose work during the last couple of years has received increasing attention. His studies on the Continent left a bigger imprint on his earlier work than is discoverable in his more recent designs, and the future is yet young for Mr. Dawn. There is a character of considerable interest in the design of the walnut chest of drawers for a man's room, which has been selected for illustration.

Mr. C. A. Richter's work has a quality in it that might be likened to sculpture, as if it had been conceived and evolved from the solid block. There is nothing finicky in his designing. Its proportions are nearly always generous and dignified, and while essentially of the modern school in line and simplicity, it is of the order that has evolved slowly from more traditional influences to its present maturity. Mr. Richter thinks first and foremost in terms of wood. Not for him the vogue for metal or colored lacquer, and it is in this sense and his almost meticulous shunning of anything approaching the sensational or surprising that we feel his link with the traditional school of thought.

were omitted. Whether the color chosen be gold, as in the case of the dressing table illustrated, or one of the reds or greens that early attracted attention to this aspect of his work, we shall find no other furniture of quite the nuances that he has made his own.

Decorative panels or pictures in wood were among the first of Mr. Rowley's achievements. He describes his conception of them rather as one sees pictures in the glowing coals of the fire; but in the wood, though the picture will have taken shape in the mind, as paper may be cut into shapes,

the grain of the variety chosen must have its influence on the final form. Yet Mr. Rowley must not be dismissed as an idealist or rebel of vague experiments in a flight from tradition. He is a realist in placing practical needs foremost in his designing, with a consideration for the everyday requirements of home life, even to the saving of space by specially planned furniture.

Mr. Gordon Russell founded the Gordon Russell workshops in Broadway, one of the beautiful old villages of Worcestershire. Here are his headquarters, and it is in this setting that he evolves his designs. These seem as if in his great sincerity of purpose he had unconsciously absorbed the atmosphere of old English countryside, expressing at once a modern and living spirit of art that has yet an intensely traditional instinct.

Apart from the creation of beautiful designs of finest (Continued on page 408)

THE WORK OF C. A. RICHTER gives the impression of having been conceived and evolved from the solid block. This sideboard illustrates the dignity and restraint for which his designs are noted



ENGLISH DESIGN IN MODERN FURNITURE

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craftsmanship, Mr. Russell has achieved his great ambition of placing simple but good furniture within the reach of all who appreciate it. This is a very definite and individual contribution to the George V period. He has made it practicable by the use of machinery in the early stages of production, just so far in fact as machinery may be used without jeopardizing the finish and workmanship of the completed design.

His designs are preëminently English in their outlook and expression, and his first choice of wood is English oak. Nevertheless he has complicated his work by the use of many woods. English cherry he brought back into favor, a yellow mellowing wood with a beautiful surface. Walnut (English), chestnut, yew, and laburnum he has called into service, thereby developing an accurate knowledge of the growth, structure, conversion, and buying of all these timbers.

Mr. Russell, like so many young men, first dreamed of his

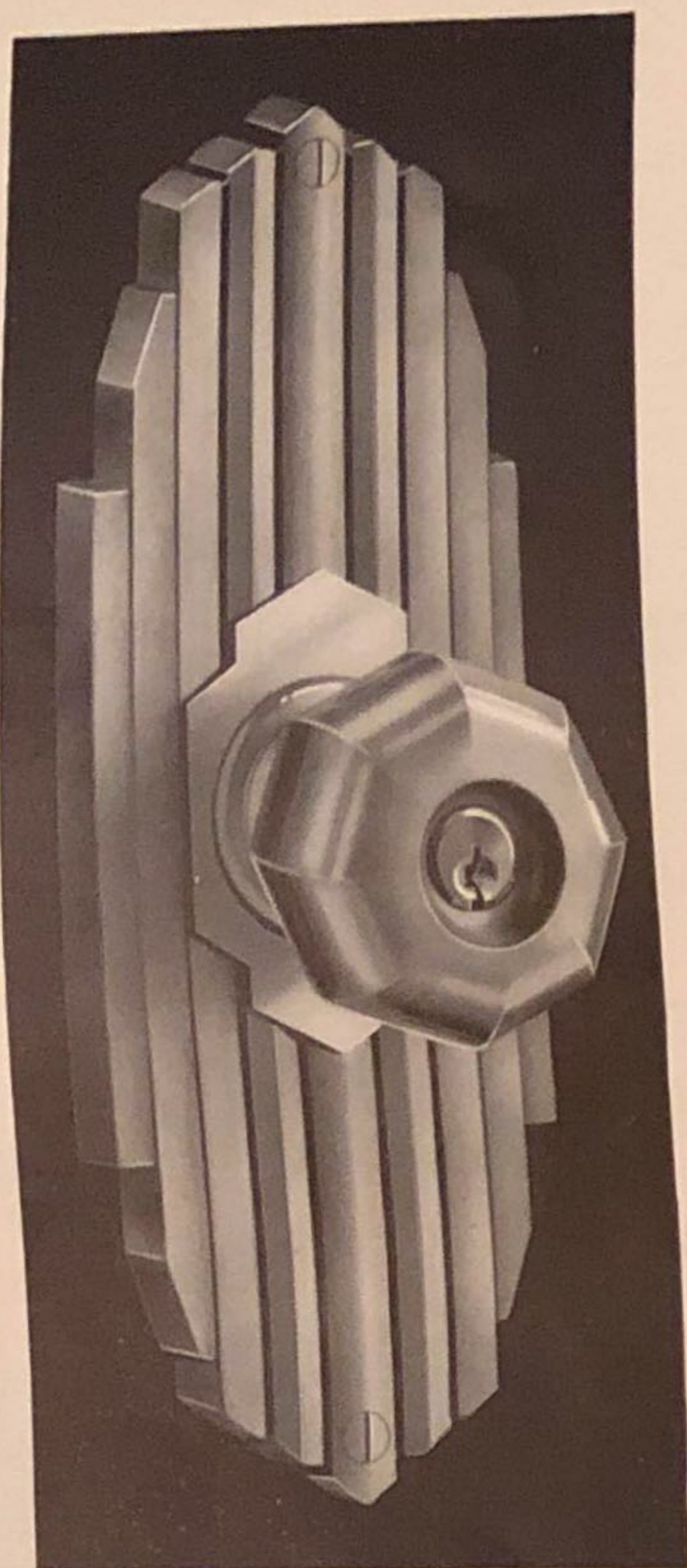
work in the days of war, when the grim realities led idealistic minds to plan and build for the day when fighting would be over. Perhaps it was these dreams that also influenced Mr. Russell's designs. There is nothing rustic in the cottage sense in his use of oak or any other wood, but his designs are tranquil and sturdy, unfretful, like the tree itself. He delights in lines of inlay, or bog-oak handles, while faceting is one of the most expressive and characteristic features of his designs.

Time alone can give us history with its dispassionate light upon the merits of man's handiwork. The present age is a crowded one, moving swiftly, so that men or things have but scant space to be outstanding in the panorama. The work of the contemporary designers of furniture, however, must without doubt be accounted among those factors that have contributed to a real spirit of reconstruction in a world that has scarcely recovered from the disillusion of the World War.

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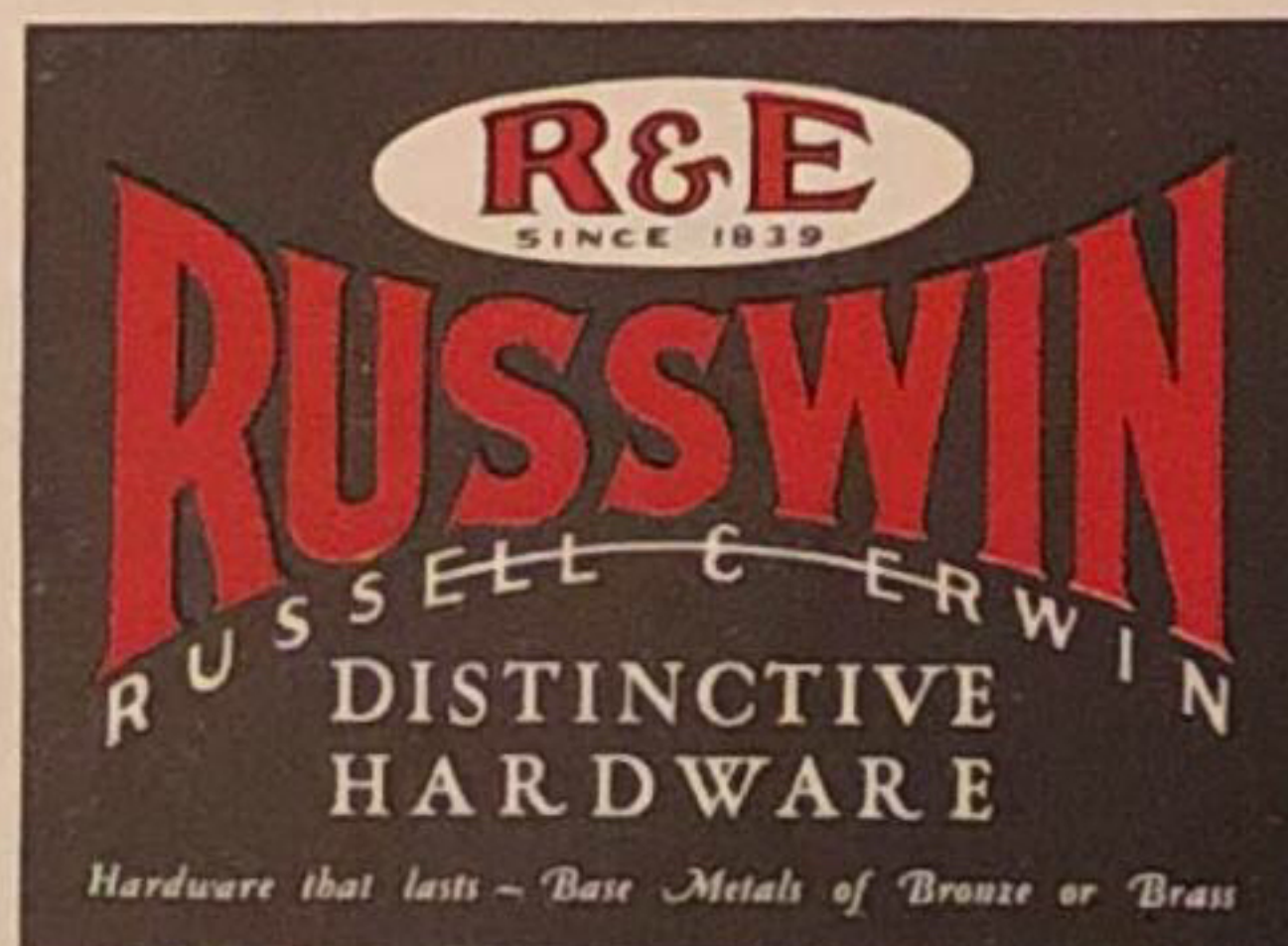


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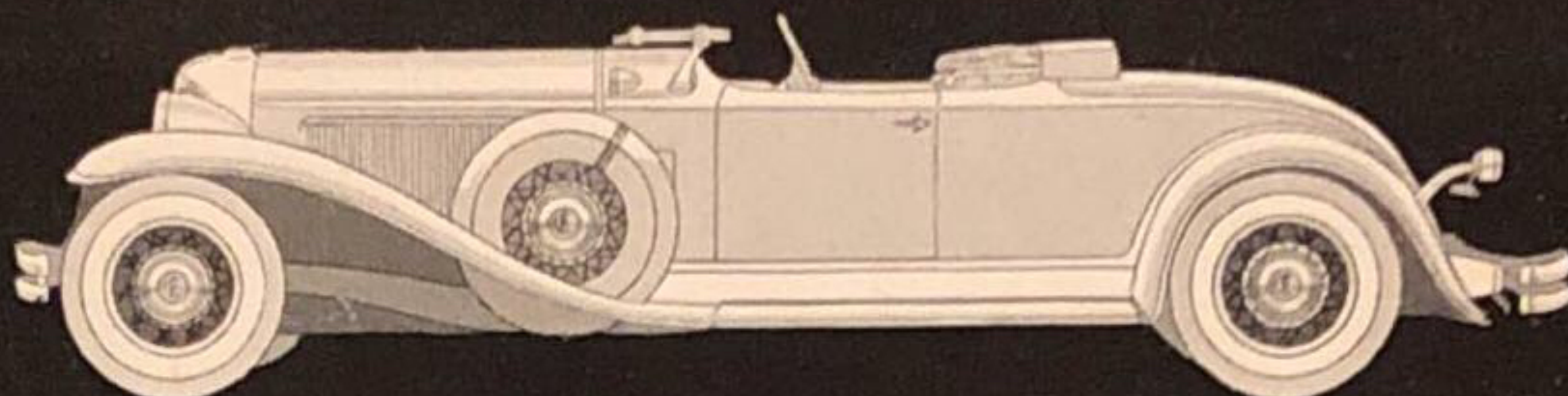
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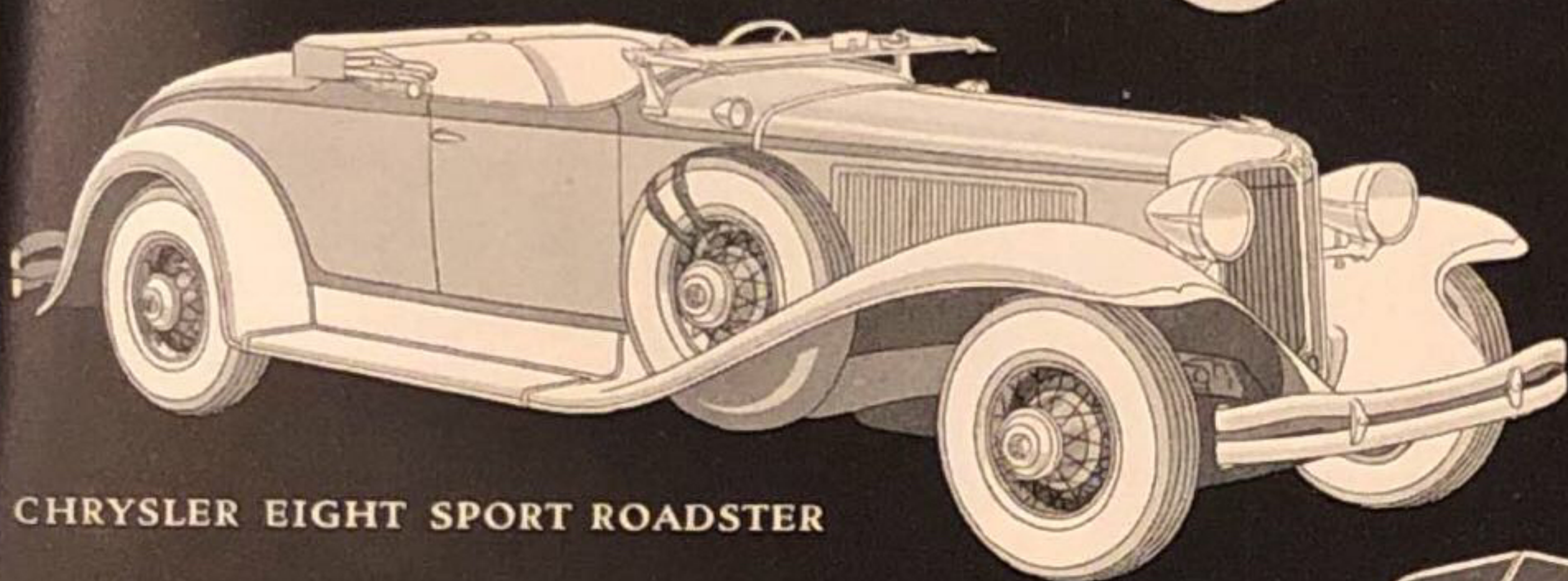
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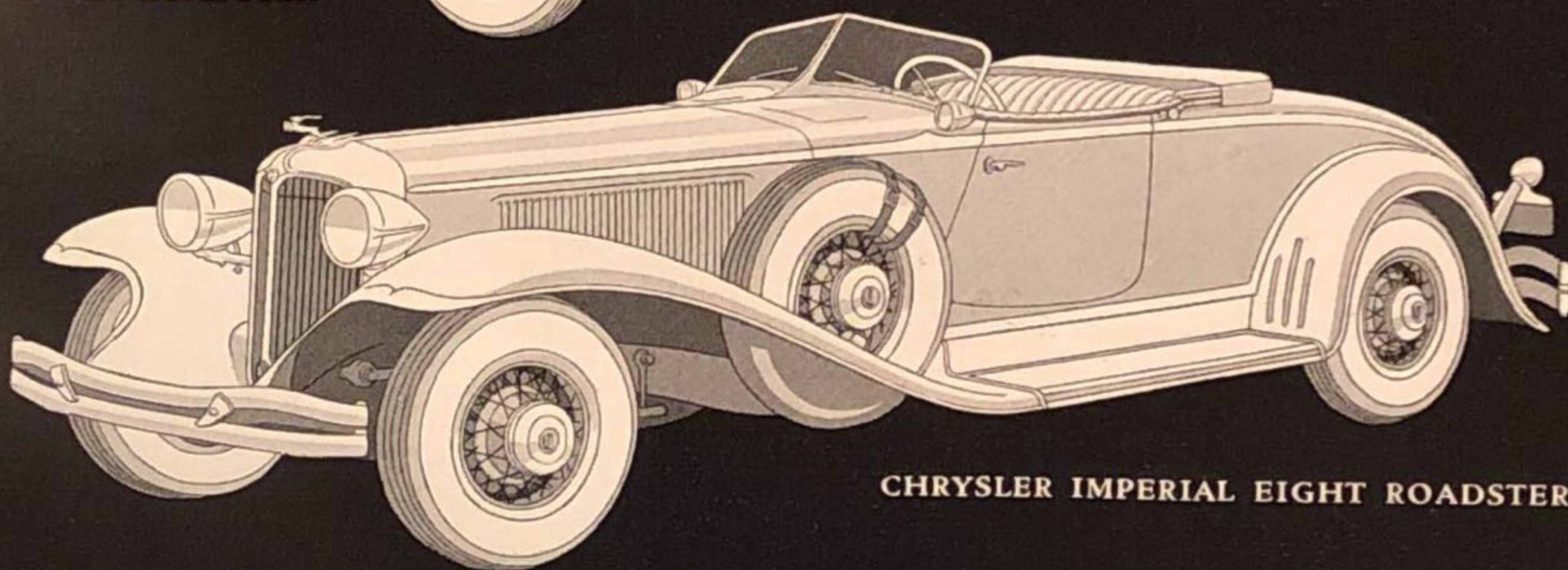
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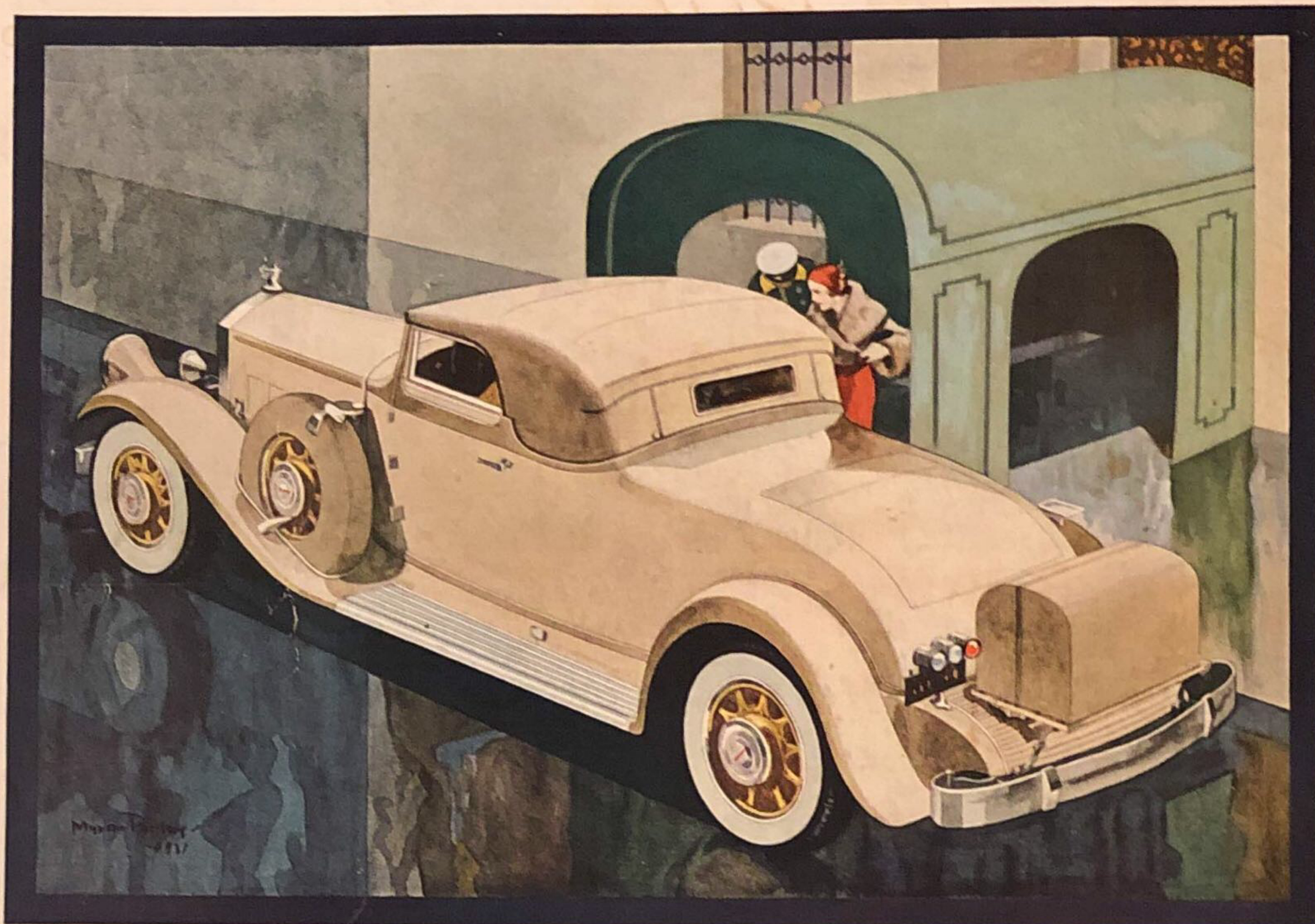
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