her drawing

Conference room drawing by Florence Knoll Bassett

The early 20th century office was strongly affected by the Taylor's ideas on people's productivity. Office workers were closely treated like machine parts conducting specific activities of the "production line". The architectural space was designed as to increase the workers' productivity and it was molded by the new subjectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit). However, by the end of the second world war emerged a foreground for more humanized environments. Architects, such as Florence Knoll, played a predominant role on the humanization of the corporate environment and the democratization of space. The subject of this thesis is to investigate the role that domesticity played towards the humanization of the corporate environment through the work of Florence Knoll Bassett. Departing from her drawing of the conference room, the thesis pursues to reveal the aspirations derived from the domestic narrative in the design of corporate spaces during the early post-war period in the United States.

domestic imprints

Florence Knoll and the role of domesticity in the early post-war American office

andreas giagkou

the architect, history and her drawing

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Florence Knoll Bassett, Conference room drawing, 1961, Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, Archives of American Art.

I would like to thank Amy Thomas for our delightful discussion and her contribution to my research with valuable information.

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Introduction

The topic of this thesis emerged having as a departure point a drawing made by Florence Knoll during the 1960s, in order to communicate to a client, the concept for the design of an interior space (Figure 3). The first attempt to describe Florence Knoll Bassett's drawing took place in ignorance of her objectives and her pursuits in the field of architecture. The intuitive interpretation of the drawing ended up on describing a scene of a household's dinner space. Indeed, the layout of the round table with its chairs around it, the vase with the flowers located at its center. the cabinet, the sculpture, the paintings on the wall, but also the warmth of the brown colors evokes a feeling of comfort and safety which is characteristic to a domestic interior. However, the drawing really represents the interior of a conference-room in a company's offices, as the handwritten note on the top part of the drawing's page indicates (Figure 3). My misconception of the drawing's content stood as chance to reconsider its purpose. Despite its reference to a corporate environment, the confusion it creates might not be accidental. Eventually, the blurring of the boundaries between the corporate and the domestic, seems to be more intentional and well represented in Knoll's conference-room drawing than I initially thought.

Florence Knoll, the American architect who became well known as a design director and co-owner of the Knoll Associates¹, believed that a working space should reflect the personality of its occupants (Araujo, 2021, p.32). Through her designs, a corporate space would transform into a place that one would intuitively associate to as a substitute for a home. Designing in a Taylor-driven culture, the drawing of the conference-room suggests that Knoll would attribute a domestic quality in the workplace's living environment, blurring thus the limits between the home and the office. Instead of a typical office's conference room, her corporate interiors would mostly look alike a living

¹ Florence Knoll co-owned the Knoll Associates with her husband, Hans Knoll, who immigrated to the United States in 1937, to start his own firm providing with furniture the American market of architects (Makovsky, 2011, p. 76). The Hans G. Knoll Furniture Company was officially founded in 1940, during a period when the modern design was gaining ground in the United States' market. By that period Florence Schust, as her name was before her marriage with Hans, had graduated from the Architectural Association, where she attended the advanced studies course. Hans and Florence joined forces after their collaboration for the Secretary of War Henry Simson's office in the Pentagon Building (Makovsky, 2011, p.87). A few years later, Florence Knoll became responsible for the coordination of all the firm's different departments, from the Planning Unit, responsible for interior spatial design. to the textile division and the marketing sector (Araujo, 2021, pp. 22-23).



Figure 1: Florence Knoll posing with her dog Cartree. Independent. 1950, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/florence-knoll-bassett-office-design-revolution-textile-obituary-death-a8779296.html



Figure 2: Florence Knoll during a meeting with clients. Smithsonian Institution, Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, 1957, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/Collectio

room or a dining space of a house. Knoll's contribution to the humanization of the office was not the first one to take place in the history of office design. The domestication of the corporate environment emerged gradually as a design quality during the twentieth century reaching its peak during the post-war period. Taking into account the dominant presence of the domestic narrative in Knoll's interiors, this thesis investigates the shaping and the role of the domesticity in the context of reconsideration of the post-war American office.

The research will combine a theoretical with a pictorial analysis. In that sense it will go beyond the reading of sources, and it will incorporate Knoll's drawing as a main core for reflection and speculation. In the first part, a thorough analysis of the drawing

explores its multiplicity. Through the reconstruction of the drawing's different elements and layers it's being an attempt to trace the patterns, or in other words, the "imprints" formulating the domestic narrative of the depicted interior. Comparing the drawing of the office's conference room with other Knoll's drawings, will contribute to the understanding of the techniques and the means that brought her narratives into fruition. In the second part of the thesis, the work of Florence Knoll is being set in its historical context. The thesis will make an attempt to explore the reasons for domesticity to gradually thrive in the history of office spaces. How did domesticity emerge in the architecture of the corporate environment and in what purpose? A short "timeline" referring to the evolution of the corporate interior shapes the context into which Knoll's chosen drawing was made. Moreover, the thesis will try to go beyond the reality the drawing communicates. Did Knoll's approach achieved to humanize the office and release it from the bleakness of the traditional Taylor-based interior? Consequently, in the third part, I attempt to discover if her intentions, which are expressed in her drawings, are also visible in the physical reality of her work. Did she manage to express the domestic narrative in the reality of her office interiors and what purpose did the narrative serve?

I. Drawing Analysis:Identifying domestic patterns

Despite the drawing's clear content there are several aspects of it that remain under question. Knoll's drawing, made during the 1960s, frames the interior of an office's conference room (Figure 3). In a Knoll's interview in the "Working Woman" magazine, the conference room drawing appears as a visual guide for the photographer, providing information about the position and the angle of the camera (Archives of American Art, 2001). That claim could also be confirmed due to the existence of a diagrammatic plan, beneath the drawing, indicating the position of the viewer-photographer. However, the drawing itself presents a careful diligence that goes beyond the mere guidance for a photo shooting. Apparently, the stickers on the four corners of the drawing's frame, prove that the drawing was made on a piece of paper which was later cut and pasted on the booklet page. It seems like it was initially made for another reason, and it was later provided to the photographer in order to prepare the scenery. It's even worth questioning if she would put such an effort to represent the space in all its spatial characteristics, colorful palette and atmospheric qualities without aiming to communicate the drawing to a client. The space left underneath the drawing was used for notes regarding listings of the existing furniture and the new ones to be added. Even though the drawing was supposedly made for the photographer, there is no available photograph of the realized interior. As a result, the actual character of the interior remains quite obscure.

The conference room's scenery presents a theatricality which references domesticity in multiple ways. The Saarinen's pedestal collection³ lies at the center of the drawing as the protagonist of the scene. The rotunda table with its chairs around it has nothing to envy from a typical dining space of a

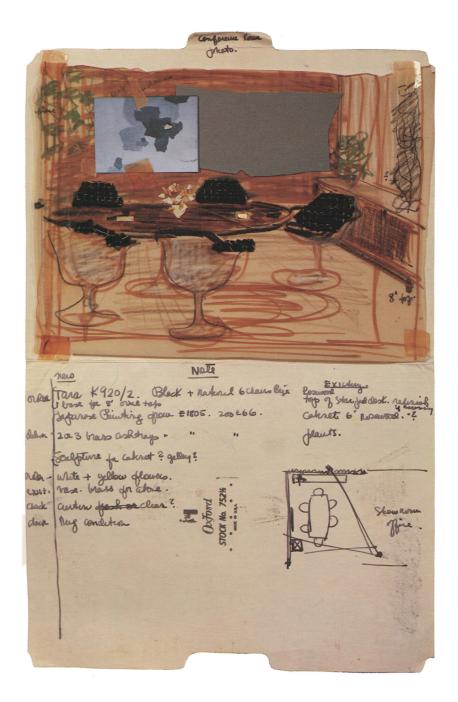
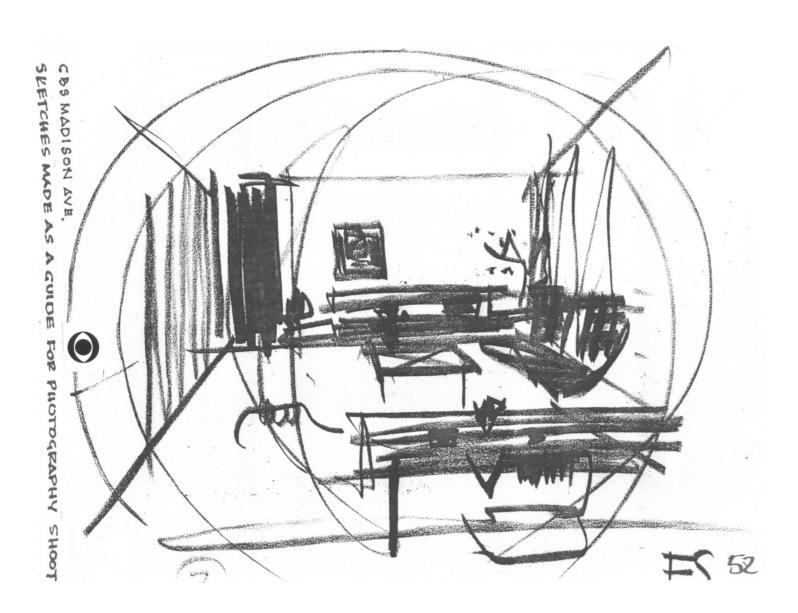


Figure 3: Florence Knoll Bassett's conference room drawing². Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, Archives of American Art, 1961, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knolflor/Box_0001/Folder_003

² The drawing, which is supposed to be made as a guide for photography, presents a processing differing dramatically to the ones of figure 4. The note on the top part of the book note's page writes "Conference Room Sketch". Underneath the drawing Knoll made a list of the elements to be added in the new design and a list with existing elements of the space that are of a particular interest for the proposal.

³ The pedestal collection and the tulip chair were only one among the multiple designs emerged through the collaboration of Eero Saarinen and Florence Knoll. They were designed in 1957 and it became one of the most commercially successful furniture designs of the Knoll Associates (Araujo, 2021, p.71). Saarinen's objective was as he said to "clear up the slum of the legs" since the "undercarriage of chairs in a typical interior makes an ugly, confusing, unrestful world" (Larrabee, Vignelli, p.57). Notably, the tulip chair and the pedestal collection were first tested in a domestic environment before taking their place in the designs of corporate interiors. More specifically, they were tested in the house of Saarinen's family (Knoll Inc. n.d.).





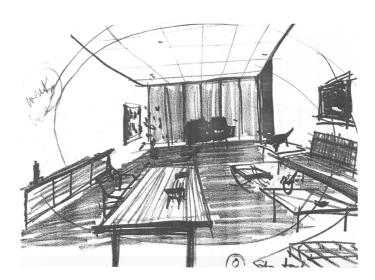


Figure 4: A series of Knoll's sketches intended to be used as a guide for the photographer, as written by Knoll in a note positioned vertically next to them⁴. Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, Archives of American Art, 1952 https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knolflor/Box_0001/Folder_003

household. The table clearly references the moments when a family, sits around the table for dinner. The flower vase, placed at its center, comes to make the reference even stronger, adding thus a sensitive layer in a social environment which is supposed to be harsh and stressful. What really contributes to the table's central role in the scenery is its framing. The two walls of the room and the objects applied on them act as a threedimensional, or in other words, a spatial frame that highlights Saarinen's dining set placed at the center. A brown color acts as the spatial frame's unifying characteristic extending from the right to the left side of the conference room (Figure 10). On the right wall, the color takes the form of a cabinet, upon which plants and a sculpture are placed. In other words, the cabinet functions as an objects' exposition reflecting the personal taste of the space's occupant. At the background wall the color transforms into a brown surface carrying two images hanged on it. Even though the blue image on the left closely resembles a map, Knoll wasn't known for placing maps on the walls in her interior designs. Instead, she had a wide interest for abstract paintings, which she was carefully choosing as integral parts of her colorful compositions. Consequently, the blue colored picture is probably the representation of a painting. On the contrary, the dark-grey picture next to it raises several questions in regard to its identity and its role in the function of the space.

At a first glance the drawing looks like a draft sketch made quickly during a conversation with the client. Despite its profound randomness, the drawing's fusion of elements is more structured and more organized than it seems. The brown colored undercoat enriches the drawing's warmth and contrasts with its elements. A black tone highlights the tulip-chairs' forms and attributes texturizing to the wooden surfaces of the table and the cabinet providing it with extra depth. The plants and the sculpture enrich the drawings color palette, but they are opaquely presented in the composition. Especially the plants are fused with the background's more aggressive lines.

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⁴ The drawings in that case lack the use of color, the pasted materials and the atmospheric qualities of the conference room's sketch.



Figure 5: The tulip chair and the pedestal collection were first tested in a domestic interior and more specifically in the Saarinens' house. Yale University Press, https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/resources/4418

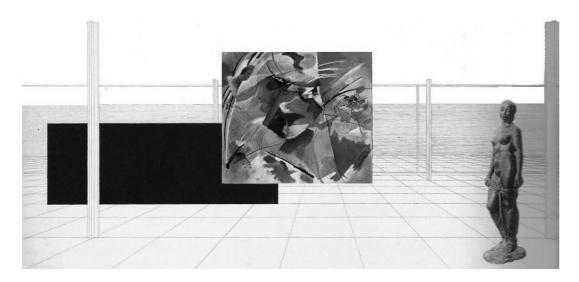
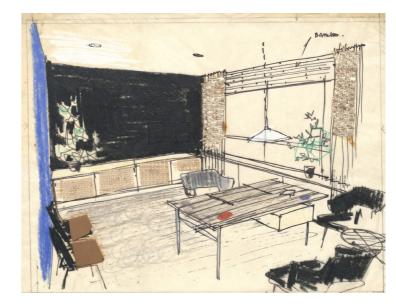


Figure 6: In Mies van der Rohe's drawings the cartesian space extends to infinity. The limits between interior and exterior are blurred. 1941-1943, Architizer, https://architizer.com/blog/inspiration/industry/mies-van-der-rohe-collages/

The drawing's perspective is also chosen as to communicate the space through a softened frame. As a result, it does not serve dynamically its purpose. The linear dynamism evoking a feeling of exposure is usually seen in Mies van der Rohe's drawings depicting continuous, cartesian spaces. These drawings give the impression that the interior space is extended outside of the building's limits (Figure 6). However, in Knoll's conference room drawing, the room's edges form a wide angle in the three dimensions. Three planes -namely the floor and the two walls of the room- that embrace like a hug the viewer's eye, are replacing the dynamic. Another feature contributing to the space's embracing quality is the existence of the curtain. The curtain in Knoll's drawings, as well as in the conference room drawing, is completely closed and there is no visibility, no communication with the outer world. Consequently, the drawing evokes a sense of protection. Knoll used this kind of wide-angle perspective in a considerable number of her office interior drawings (Figure 7, Figure 8). The view's angle plays a predominant role in softening the drawing's perspective



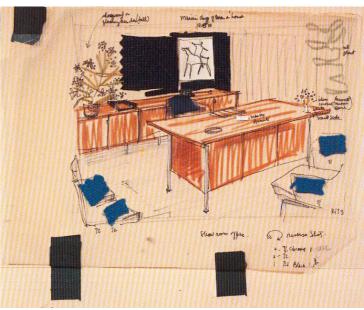


Figure 7 (top) Figure 8 (bottom):

Hans Knoll's office sketch (top)⁵, Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, Archives of American Art, 1950, https://edan.si.edu/slideshoxw/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knollfor/Box_0001/Folder_003, Proposal for office space sketch (bottom)⁵, Knoll Inc., n.d., https://www.knoll.com/knollnewsdetail/florence-knoll-bassett-dies-at-101

⁵ In both of the drawings the space's edges are sitting upon a wide-angle three-dimensional system minimizing, thus, the perspective's dynamic.



Figure 9: Paste-up plan by Florence Knoll made for an office interior.

Knoll Inc., n.d., https://www.knoll.com/knollnewsdetail/florence-knoll-herbert-matter

and in making it more embracing to the viewer's eye. At the same time, there is a distinctive binary between the inside and the outside, which contributes to the cultivation of strong relations between the viewer and the objects of the space. However, this kind of softening and warmth goes beyond the construction logic of the perspective in the drawing.

The drawing's technique presents a unique characteristic that Knoll developed quite early in her career. From the tulipchairs' seat made from actual fabric to the table's flower vase and the wall pictures made from pieces of paper, they all constitute pasted materials on the drawing. Knoll's "pasteups," as her drawings have become widely known, consist of a combination of drawn elements and real materials, such as wood chips or pieces of fabrics, which are introduced as collages on the picture and attribute to her drawings their third dimension. In that sense, the figurative and the realistic are getting fused into a two-dimensional composition. Most of Knoll's well-known paste-ups either represent the plan of an interior space or a perspective. The technique was normally used in the fashion design to highlight convincingly the idea of a clothe before its materialization (Tigerman, 2007, p.65). However, Knoll borrowed the technique, while she was studying at Architectural Association in London, to communicate the architectural qualities of her projects.

The development of the paste-ups by Knoll, as it seems, resulted after the influences by her mentors during her studies in the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Among them Loja Saarinen was among the ones responsible for Knoll's interest in paste-ups. When Knoll started graduating in the Cranbrook Academy of Arts, the Saarinens became her second family (Kaukas, 2018, p.106). Both Eliel and Loja Saarinen were teaching at Cranbrook, but their education towards Knoll was not limited behind the walls of the school. Florence would spend

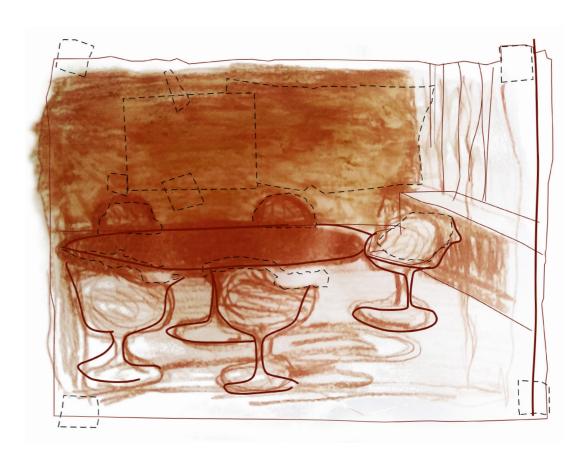


Figure 10: A brown colored spatial frame acts as an element of unification and softens the office's atmosphere. Own sketch

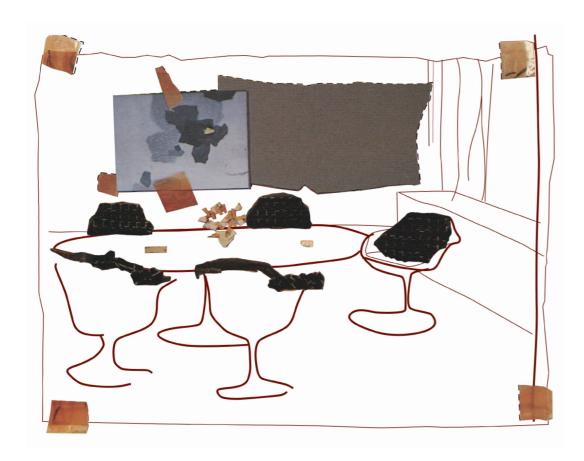


Figure 11: Highlighting of the drawing's pasted elements. Own sketch

⁶ The Knoll Associates' Planning Unit was established after the need to compose the firm's designed interiors with the furniture produced by the company, into wholistically conceived design proposals (Makovsky, 2011, p. 88). In that sense, the design was concerned with all the different scales of the project, from the design of the space to the design of its elements and their qualities: the furniture and their textiles.

several hours in the house of the Saarinen family, which also gave her the opportunity to experience deeply their design philosophy. It was back then that Loja gave to Knoll her first paste up as a gift (Figure 12). In the paste-up, a female figure on a black background wears a turquoise-colored dress and a gold foil bodice both made by actual materials pasted on the paper. Knoll developed later further her paste-ups through the Planning unit⁶ where a specific room was dedicated to the collection and processing of textiles especially for this reason (Tigerman, 2007, p.66). Paste-ups produced in there were definitely a convincing way of orienting materially the clients through the project and intrigue their imagination, but they were also favored for expressing the functionality of the space: "It was extraordinary how small swatches of fabrics & wood could convey a feeling of the space. The general scale used was Y1/4" but in special plans we worked in larger scale. I always felt the need to employ this system." (Tigerman, 2007, p.67). Nevertheless, the materials pasted on the drawings were adding a new perceptual layer in the drawing's composition: the sensual aspect of the touch.

Tactility emerges as a predominant quality in Knoll's conference room drawing and it plays key role in the shaping of the domestic narrative among the rest of the layers. Knoll was quite selective in regard to the pasted elements of the composition. The only pasted elements are the tulip-chairs' fabric, the wall paintings, and the vase (Figure 11). The whole frame of the drawing could also be considered as a pasted element on the book note's page. The interesting fact with this might be that the paintings are pasted on the drawing with the use of the same tape used for sticking the whole drawing on the book note. These two pastings possibly took place chronologically closely. In the end the use of tape creates a kind of consistency, even though it does not seem to be intentional. However, the rest of pasted features have more to state. The pasted vase becomes

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Joja Saarenens model q a dress she made for me as a christmas fresent in 1935 (or 36)

Figure 12: The paste-up with the dress made by Loja Saarinen and given to Knoll as gift.

Florence Knoll Bassett Papers, Archives of American Art, 1935-36, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knolflor/Box 0003/Folder 002





Figure 13: Highlighting of the drawing's secondary elements. Own sketch

more captivating, due to its three-dimensional quality, and hierarchically dominates the theatrical scene as a domestic element. On the other hand, the tulip-chairs' fabric refers to the softness and comfort of the domestic life. The paintings on the wall complement the collection of pasted elements as an object referring to household's habits, of placing pictures on the walls.

II. From Taylor to Knoll

The relationship between the home and the office regards a strong binary presenting a history of multiple transformations especially over the past 100 years. While the home has always been part of the private sphere, protecting the family life, the office, on the contrary, could be considered as the intermediate space, fluctuating between the public and the private. Despite the identity of the office interior as the human working environment, its character has been constantly hybridized in the name of efficiency and development of the human productivity. The necessity for efficiency became all the more pressing during the 20th century. Throughout its occupation either from the factory's operational character, or from home's softening qualities, the office interior has constantly been a testing ground for improving the intellectual human labor. It thus, developed as a space of emerging illusions, bearing a resemblance as a concept, with the illusional domestic interior that Walter Benjamin described during the first half of the 20th century. According to Benjamin, the domestic interior acts as a vessel preserving the occupants' illusions. It becomes a place of escape from the unpleasant realities, where the individuals create their own universe and their space becomes "a box in the theater of the world" (Benjamin, 1927-1940, pp.19-20). Especially the office's occupation by the domestic narrative during the 20th century, was developed under the idea of "masking" the stressful working environment towards reaching its humanized aspect. Architects, such as Florence Knoll, paved the path towards the softening of the corporate space and blurred the limits between the private and the public, between the domestic and the corporate.

However, Knoll is not to celebrate as one of the pioneers who blurred the boundaries between the home and the office in the mid-twentieth century. As Duffy suggests, this phenomenon was also visible in the early 20th century office (Duffy, 1986. p. 144).

⁷ In the form of a palazzo, the building would vibrate solidity and the sense of proximity which is characteristic to a small community. The selection of the palazzo as the building's architectural signature might not be coincidental if we take into account the strong association of the type to the Italian domestic life. The office environment would more or less reflect the qualities of an interior household, especially in the small enterprises hosting a short number of clerical workers. Consequently, their offices had nothing to envy from a domestic interior in a traditional style of Georgian or Luis XV. The Sun Life Insurance company office in London represents paradigmatically the domestic feeling evoked from the offices of a high-status company. Despite its small scale and its low growing paces as an organism, the clerks working there would be considered of high value because of their exceptional skills (Duffy, 1989, p.262). In the case of the Sun Life Insurance company, a number of rooms would accommodate the workers who occupied the space and personalized them⁷. The spaces were formulating a sense of belonging for the workers and would reflect their high status. High ceiling rooms, equipped with domestic furniture, were viewing the urban street life (Figure 14). A working area with a desk was centered in the room while a fireplace was contributing to adding another functional layer in the composition, the layer of entertainment. The work in that case, was not an activity delimited to undisturbed production. On the contrary, it was offering the option of pausing to speculate and rest in the same way life would develop in a typical household. While domesticity had already appeared in the offices of the early 20th century, it was only a privilege of the companies' prominent workers. What really changed during the mid-century office design, is the democratization of this privilege, which would be provided to all the employees of the company.

The rocketing financial development of the early 20th century was visible through the growth and increase of the size of several corporate organizations. Companies were getting larger with employees' number reaching up to one hundred and this was also reflected in the size of the corporate buildings (Duffy, 1989, p.265). This new condition was affecting the companies' inner organization and the human relationships in the office were becoming more impersonal. The number of employees under the

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Figure 14: The Sun Insurance Office references a typical domestic interior. (Duffy, n.d., p. 262)

supervision of a clerical manager was increasing and this fact was reducing the possibilities of interaction between the workers with their manager (Forty, 1986, p. 121). During this period, on the peak of industrial revolution, the management of labor took a central position in the economic sciences. Taylorism, a new management model would dictate the office interior at least until the end of the Second World War. Invented by Frederick Taylor, it dominated the corporate environment by suggesting the most functional organization of flows and by eliminating as much as possible the loss of benefit for the companies. As noted by Ross, time and motion were the ultimate driving forces of success (Ross, 2012). The model's principles suggested a careful examination of each part of the office space, from its spatial arrangement to the function of its furniture. Open-plan spaces, occupied by endless rows of desks for the clerks who were supervised by the

⁸ In the Larking building, a central atrium facilitates the working stations and is surrounded by balconies viewing into it. The duty of each employ was calculated in exceptional accuracy and even the passage of the papers from hand to hand was set under the analytical estimation of the time. As it is characteristically mentioned in a McLeod's article, managers were using filming techniques as to analyze the movements of the workers and discover any issues in time management: "The film frames, taken every 1/15 of a second, revealed useless or inefficient movements, which could be then eliminated" (Mc Leod, 1983, p. 133).

manager, constituted the equivalent of a typical factory occupied by machines: a white-collar factory. Forty describes thoroughly the logic behind the design of office equipment which were in constant refinements so as to be used as efficiently as possible (Forty, 1986, p. 122). The office furniture was intentionally designed as industrial machines so that the office could clearly be associated with the factory. As a result, most of the equipment was made out of steel since it was communicating the factory language. An early example of the office-factory regard the Larkin building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The building was made as a mail order house and could facilitate up to one hundred workers. It became a prototype for the applications of the scientific management, and it was advertised in several handbooks of scientific management (Duffy, 1989, p.265)8.

The softening of the factory-office arrived due to a variety of reasons and most of them are still under wide consideration. One explanation behind the intrusion of domesticity in the corporate space theorizes as a cause the malfunctions of Taylorism. When the working necessities demanded from the executives to accomplish some of their duties from home, the industrial appearance of the office equipment would not fit properly in the domestic setting. Consequently, the office equipment started being redesigned to fulfil its purpose as a domestic object. The complicated form of the machine was covered under elegant, curvy shells. At the same time, it was a belief that the clerical worker wouldn't need to know how the machine exactly operates in order to use it (Forty, 1986, pp. 134-135). Another explanation comes to highlight the presence of women in the men-driven workplace. Penny Sparkes believes that the clear division of the domestic with the corporate space, which took place during the mid-nineteenth century, played a key role in the cultivation of different sensitivities among women and men. The house was the woman's universe. At the same time, it was expressing the personal character of its occupants.

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2.8



Figure 15: Portable typewriter with its exposed mechanical parts, designed in 1923 by John Henry Barr, professor of machine design and mechanical engineer in Comell University. Oz Typewriter, https://oztypewriter.blogspot.com/

Figure 16: The more recent design of portable typewriter "Lattera 22", designed by the architect-designer Marcello Nizzoli in collaboration with the engineer Giuseppe Beccio for Olivetti⁹. Samantha de Martin, https://www.bulgarihotels.com/it_IT/milan/whats-on/article/milan/in-the-city/the-lettera-22---an-icon-of-design-at-the-triennal

However, during the last decades of the 19th century, the softened domestic environment started occupying the emerging places of the public realm: the market halls, the museums or the hotels. The office was also one of them. "Wherever middle-class women could be found traveling, shopping, undertaking leisure pursuits, being treated for hysteria, or working", as Sparke mentions, "domestic interiors could also be found" (Sparke, 2008, p.6).

It is worth here wondering whether femininity was a cause for the existence of the domestic narrative in Knoll's projects. Florence Knoll was a woman acting in an environment dominated by men and consequently, she introduced design sensitivities which were back then less considered. The notion of interior design itself, is certainly an achievement that Knoll should be celebrated for (Tigerman, 2007 p.61). In an era when architecture was considered more as a practice of designing the building and not that much its interior, Knoll would treat the architecture of the interior equally to the architecture of the building. The company would consider the building with its architectural qualities as totality being visible in all its different scales, from the structure to its furniture. Notably Lucinda Kaukas refers to Knoll's interior designs as architecture based on "principles" and not "effects" which, as a term, refers more to decoration and less to architectural values (Kaukas, 2019, p. 129). Another fact deriving from Knoll's sensitivities is the establishment of the "textile division of Knoll Associates" as a service sector of the firm (Knoll Inc., n.d.)¹⁰. Mostly driven by women, the department was responsible for the design of textiles used both in the design of interior spaces and to the making of upholstered furniture. The textiles became an integral part of the firm's design approach, and they were predominantly defining the identity of the interiors. The strong presence of textile samples on Knoll's drawings were integrating the textiles in the design process from the very beginning of the conception of the project. However, the cause for Knoll's domestic narration as it seems extends beyond her female nature. There seems to be a psychological implication behind her



Figure 17: Florence Knoll linen samples made for the textile division of Knoll Associates. (Makovsky, 2011, p.144)

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⁹ The typewriter in this case is being reconsidered as an object fitting in the domestic context.

¹⁰ The department responsible for the design and production of fabrics changed its name multiple times in the firm's history. The title "textile division of Knoll Associates" was the department's name when it was firstly created in 1947 (Martin, 2011. p.25). The department became the working laboratory for several women providing them the opportunity to grow and gain skills on textile design even if they wouldn't qualify for such a position. Eszter Haraszty, for example, who coordinated the textile division had no experience both on textile design and on running a department when she was hired by Knoll. She had instead a sense of color and design sensitivities that Knoll believed were necessary (Ward, 2011, p. 140).

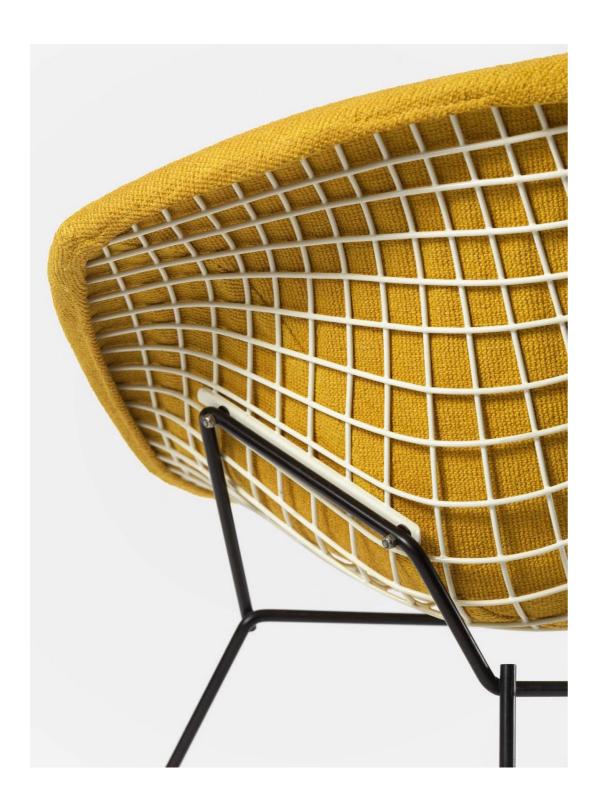


Figure 18: Detail of the chair designed by Harry Bertoia and the chair's fabric designed for the textile division of Knoll Associates. (Makovsky, 2011, p.125)

¹¹ Florence Knoll lost her family in 1931 and she was later sent to the Kingswood School, which was included in the complex of the Cranbrook Academy of Arts. Both Eliel and Loja Saarinen were teaching at Cranbrook, but their education towards Knoll was not limited behind the school's walls, since Knoll would spend several hours in the Saarinens' house (Makovsky, 2011, p. 83).

sensitivity. Knoll's unfortunate loss of her family was the cause of being adopted by the Saarinen family (Araujo, 2021, p.51)¹¹. Back in her studies in the Kingswood school for girls, Knoll was asked by the head what she would like to work on for the studio. Among the multiple choices she had, Knoll decided to design a house. In an interview she gave in 1984 she claimed that her choice back then might had been psychological. As she said, she decided to design a house, because she never had one. The school's handyman then made the model and Knoll took care of its details with furnishings and textiles she had made herself (Archives of American Art, 2001). Evidently, the dramatic incident of her childhood shaped her personal desires which were later reflected on her work.

III. Domestic Illusions

As it has already been mentioned, a photograph of the drawing's conference room realized is not available. This guides the research towards finding different ways of perceiving the reality in the work of Florence Knoll. Since the drawing blurs the limits between the office's conference room and the house's dining space, the research will focus on the comparison between the drawing and conference rooms-dining spaces designed or inspired by Knoll. In all of these examples, the Saarinen's pedestal collection plays a key role in the composition. Knoll achieved in celebrating domesticity in several of her projects such as the offices of Columbia Broadcasting Systems, General Motors, Connecticut General, H. J. Heinz, Look Publications, Alcoa, First National Bank of Miami, and the Southeast Bank. However, the personalization of the space and the reference of its materiality to the comforts of the domestic life, were being utilized selectively for the benefit



Figure 19: The workstations in CBS headquarters. Smithsonian Institution, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knolflor/Box_0003/Folder_022

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Figure 20: The conference room in the CBS headquarters. Smithsonian Institution, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/knolflor/Box_0003/Folder_022

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¹² Saarinen was commissioned as the building's architect, and he would proceed to the design of the interiors with the help of Knoll. His unexpected death in 1961 led to the taking over of the interior design by the Knoll Planning Unit. The offices would be placed in a newly erected building, 38 floors tall and with the capacity to host 2.700 employees (Araujo, 2021, p.127)

of the prominent members of the companies and to showcase their status (Araujo, 2021, pp.25-35). The interiors of the Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS) headquarters in New York, designed by Knoll Planning Unit fall in this category (Figure 19, Figure 20). The project was completed in 1964 and it was the last project Knoll worked on during her career in the Knoll Associates 12. The Knoll Planning Unit designed the offices of the executive officers with exceptional care, giving emphasis to the symbolization of the occupants' status. At the same time, the employees wouldn't enjoy comfort at the same level in their working stations (Figure 19). Another example

regards the Deering Milliken & Company first-floor sales area, where instead of personalized working stations, Knoll applied a unified repetitive material palette (Figure 21). The working station of each clerical worker consists of a specific set of elements. All the desks are identical, while a dark fabric is used to define the workers' seat and a red fabric upholsters the seat of their guests. Even the telephones and the paper cases present the same design from station to station. Consequently, the workers would watch the executive officers' offices as "a dream to come true", hoping that one day they would manage to possess a prominent position in the company. As Renyi Hong, communications and new media researcher, has mentioned: "In one aspect, the fantasy of the office, related to the fantasy of meritocracy" (Araujo, 2021, p. 126). Evidently, the available image of the CBS conference room showcases the most convincing crystallization of Knoll's drawing (Figure 20). Even though the CBS conference room shares several similarities with Knoll's drawing, it doesn't narrate in any way the domestic environment. The Saarinen's table is similarly positioned at the center of the space and the flower vase lays on it too. In this case, the Saarinen's tulip chairs have been replaced by a variation of them with However, while in Knoll's drawing the pasted elements achieve to transfer the viewer to an imaginary domestic interior, in the CBS conference room, the same elements -the chairs' fabrics, the flower vase and the wall paintings- are overtaken by the sophisticated material palette of the surroundings. The gold-painted walls, the white ceiling, the satin light brown maquette and the golden flower vase on the cabinet shape a luxurious setting that mostly references the status and the wealth of the company. Behind the white wall panels and into the wooden cabinet are hidden TV screens, while the drum-table functions as a controller of the invisible system (Figure 20). The room constitutes broadcasting machine camouflaged under a luxury cover.



It would be expected that Knoll's furniture would perfectly form the interior of a household. Nevertheless, they have been occasionally used more as a medium expressing the corporate identity of their owner than as domestic object. A characteristic example of the introduction of Knoll's elements in the domestic interior is the Miller House in Columbus, Indiana, designed for the industrialist J. Irwin Miller and his family in 1957 (Sveiven, 2011). The house was the product of collaboration between Eero Saarinen, Alexander Girard and Daniel Kiley. While Saarinen perceived the architecture of the building, Alexander Girard took over the interior design and Daniel Kiley the landscape design. Even though the building was designed as a place suitable to raise children, one of its main purposes was also to be used for the entertainment of business guests during the year (Sveiven, 2011). The interior develops as an open-plan, flowing space into which are floating public or private areas devoted to different activities of the household (Figure 22). The dining space with the Saarinen's pedestal chair stands as an exceptional area of the flowing interior and captures the attention of the guests. The rotunda table with the chairs around it is placed at the center of the space, in front of a glass façade, blending thus with the natural scenery (Figure 23). Instead of the typical Saarinen's table, Girard placed a variation of it with a differentiated organic support. Despite its presence in the domestic context, the dining space lacks considerably the warmth of the drawing's atmospheric qualities. The white color dominates the scene and forms a monolithic environment highlighting thus the furniture's sculptural qualities. At the same time, it acts as a neutral canvas helping the ornamental multicolored layer, consisting of geometric patterns, to stand out. Any material reference, any tactility is being erased by the existence of a colorful palette contrasted to the white undercoat. Saarinen's pedestal

¹³ In figure 22 the dining space, thus, is isolated from the home's daily life in the kitchen and stands as a showcase of the occupant's status.

collection follows the same principle applied on the executive officers' equipment, which were redesigned so as to fit the domestic setting, as mentioned in the second chapter. The use of Saarinen's pedestal collection in Miller's house proves its appropriation as an element that fits well in the domestic environment. In that sense, it explains its contribution to the formation of the domestic narrative when it's integrated in an office space. However, the Girard's composition in the Miller's House emerges more as a reference to the entertaining part of business, than to the family life. Even the distance of the dining space from the house's kitchen exiles the space from the family's daily life and transforms it into a showcase for the guests. Paradoxically, an element that could enhance the domestic quality, acts as an intruder coming from the corporate reality.



Figure 22: The plan of the Miller House made by Eero Saarinen and enriched by Alexander Girard with linen samples for the interior design¹³. IMA Indianapolis Museum of Art, http://archive.imamuseum.org/record/8394/



Figure 23: The Miller House's dining space. Yellow Tracer, https://www.yellowtrace.com.au/eero-saarinen-miller-house/

IV. Final Thoughts

Florence Knoll started her career in the Knoll Associates during a period when the domestic narrative had already been seeded in the corporate interior. However, there was still a clear distinction between the house as a space for the woman and the office as an environment dominated by men. The ideas Knoll developed in the Knoll Associates were, as it seems, more than a sufficient strategy for managing the firm. Instead, she would "design" her own company in the same way she would like to design her corporate spaces as diverse, democratic environments. The establishment of the textile division, a women-driven department, was certainly contributing to the firm's diverse nature. Simultaneously, the textile division was highlighting the textiles' key-role in Knoll's corporate designs, which were expressing the domestic narrative. Indeed, Knoll's conference room drawing achieves to communicate the domestic narrative thanks to its tactile layer made out of fabrics. Nevertheless, it is hard to claim that the emergence of the narrative in Knoll's work was due to her feminine nature. Her rough childhood was evidently a reason that led her seek for the warmth of family in several aspects of her life. The project of the house she made back in the Cranbrook Academy of Arts as she claimed, is an example highlighting her desire.

The furniture designs made by Eeero Saarinen for Knoll, which are also visible in the drawing, ended up playing a binary role through their use. The existence both of the pedestal and the tulip chairs in the drawing contributes to the warmth of the atmosphere in the conference room and they sufficiently served that role in Knoll's realized projects as well. Their curvy design certainly played a role in their effective qualities. Saarinen followed the same strategy of the pre-war period, when the office equipment was redesigned so as to fit the houses of executive officers who wanted to work from home. An office equipment properly standing in a softened domestic interior, would induce the

softening of the office as well. However, Saarinen's furniture was associated with comfort, without necessarily referencing the domestic interior. Even though, their design made them fit perfectly in a domestic space, as seen in the case of Miller's house, they would mostly be used for showcasing the occupant's status. Especially in the Miller's house, they ended up playing a role much more as corporate objects, than domestic furniture.

Knoll's vision for humanized corporate environments is clearly implied in her drawings, but her realized work leave a lot to be desired. Eventually, Knoll borrowed elements from the domestic environment that, in her realized projects, were overlapped by the needs for functionality and the show of prestige of her clients. This is proved in the case of CBS conference room and the employees' working spaces in the Deering Milliken & Company first-floor sales area. In her drawings, she was free to highlight the elements that would mostly reference the domestic narrative, such as the fabrics, the flower vase and the warm brown color. On the contrary, in her realized interiors, the same elements would dissolve in the indulgence of the room shaped by the luxury of materials. Consequently, while Knoll's drawing evokes the domestic narrative, her realized work do not reflect convincingly the same qualities. There are times that the realized work doesn't reflect faithfully the concept of the designer. As in the case of Florence Knoll, drawings occasionally end up maintaining the vision of their creator trapped in the dimension of the paper as a fantasy.

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