The Design School
Arizona State University

Charles + Ray Eames

Max Underwood
TTh 10:30-11:45 Design South 137

APH 598: Charles + Ray Eames (3 credit hours)

“Examination of the Office of Charles + Ray Eames, their masterworks, and the specific personal and cultural forces which shaped its evolution. Case studies/field trips. Professional level standing or permission of the instructor.”

“True education is the habitual contemplation of greatness.”
Alfred North Whitehead, Dialogues 1953.
One of the most challenging questions that every student and professional intern faces during in their early career is: How shall I practice? To assist them in answering this difficult, multi-layered and far-reaching question I developed the Great Practice seminar in 1997. Each seminar has offered students and professional interns an opportunity to examine in depth one significant design practice over the duration of a semester. The inspiration for these seminars sprang out of my own experience of working in the Office of Charles and Ray Eames, and my extensive field research on the practices of Louis Kahn, Luis Barragán, Tadao Ando, Peter Zumthor and Rem Koolhaas (OMA/AMO).

During the course of the semester, as the organization, growth and evolution of our selected practice is discussed, many key issues will arise, which include: How do these designers understand, envision, and facilitate change in the profession? How do they get their clients? How do they organize and manage their design work? What are their daily working relations with clients, consultants and contractors? And, what is it about this practice that enables them to move from simply being a good practice to great practice? It is my goal to provide each student with a model of professional excellence and practice that they fully understand and can strive to emulate in their own life and professional career.

**The Office of Charles and Ray Eames (1941-1988)**

"The Eameses have so strongly influenced the way we sit, store things, build, play, communicate, teach, learn, and think, it would almost seem that the diversity is their genius. Not so. What their genius represents is not merely minds versatile enough to move in many directions, but minds so wholly centered that it brings precisely the same talent and experience to bear upon problems that seem vastly different from each other. It is that unity of approach that lets us see the quintessential Eameses in almost anything they do - whether it's an astronomy lesson or physics or a chaise lounge or a film."

**Ralph Caplan Herman Miller: Adventures in Design lecture.**

Charles and Ray Eames dedicated their lives to the endless search for connections, which celebrate the experiences of life and the evolving nature of things, which surround us. Practicing in the dawn of the television age, the Eameses realized that designers must be prepared to redefine the boundaries of projects and engage a multitude of creative activities. The breath and depth of their creative work is simply staggering, which includes over nine hundred designs for furniture, toys, exhibitions, films, graphics and architecture. The hallmark of Eames design is that it simultaneously directs a process of discovery to arrive at penetrating insight, as well as convey and celebrate those discoveries clearly to people of any age.

From 1941 to 1988 the Office of Charles and Ray Eames redefined "design" as not simply making objects, but formulating new ways to see and embrace the richness of life around us. The Eames Office was an experimental laboratory of catalytic clutter where an array of cultural artifacts, raw materials, tools, and a multi-talented staff were transformed at any moment by fresh perceptions, energetic discourse and hard work. The design projects, or "design problems," as the Eameses called them, were not solved with willful gestures or preconceived notions, but with making precise connections between situations and conditions. Problem solving began with extensive research and observation of the multiple situations and conditions that surrounded the artifact of inquiry. Through the "intelligence of the eye," using the tools of photography and film, a rough understanding of the ideas and their possible intellectual and emotional connections were reached and documented. Collective analysis of these records, coupled with more precise research and discourse with consultants and area specialists, established the critical inter-relationships, constraints, boundaries and ultimately a focus for future investigations. At this point, the design exploration of the Eames Office shifted to combine the "intelligence of the eye" with the "intelligence of the hand." Simultaneous design activities of scale models, full-scale material mock-ups, documentary film and photography became interdependent instruments of discovery enabling future assessment and refinement to occur. The "design problems" were always mentally and physically absorbing, challenging and demanding. Work in the Office of Charles and Ray Eames was "a difficult form of play."

In 1985, Charles and Ray Eames were internationally recognized at the World Design Conference, as "the most influential designers of the 20th century". Today "Eames Design" is synonymous with the word "designer," and their creative work continues to be the measure and standard against which all designers and their work are judged.
objectives

“Design is it! Fifteen years ago, companies competed on price. Today it’s quality. Tomorrow it’s design.”

Tom Peters The Circle of Invention: You can’t shrink your way to Greatness 1997.

experiencing great practice

The first educational goal of the seminar is to enable each student to experience the richness of Great Practice – this semester, The Office of Charles and Ray Eames. Students will develop a first hand understanding of and an appreciation for why great design happens, how it is brought about, and what it is. This will be achieved by exposing the students to the breadth of design venues the Eames Office worked in via readings, field trips to experience the work, films, faculty lectures, and case studies.

understanding great practice

The second goal of the seminar is to have each student understand the organization and workings of a great practice, and the specific personal, cultural, political, economic, and technical forces which shape its evolution. This is achieved through a series of readings, films, faculty lectures, case studies and subsequent dialogues on the Eames Office’s formation, philosophy of practice, core moral and ethical values, office management, design and construction processes, strategies for developing technical expertise, and strategies for adaptation to growth and change.

formulate and implement your own new collaborative practice

The third objective is to allow each student the opportunity to formulate and implement, his or her own model of great practice, within a new collaborative design practice or “office.” Each office will be asked to develop a set of core moral and ethical values, philosophy of practice, office organization, design and construction process, and then implement and test its success by executing two hands-on material investigations.

format and methodology

"We work because it's a chain reaction, each subject leads to the next."

Charles Eames Norton Lecture #5, Harvard University, 29 March 1971.

our website

https://herbergeronline2.asu.edu/eames

introduction of the Eames practice: Lectures, readings and critical dialogues

The introduction of Charles and Ray, their philosophy, office organization, design methods, and practice strategies are accomplished through faculty lectures, group dialogues of primary source readings and film screenings. These are always followed by intense dialogue on the contemporary relevance and significance of their design work in comparison to professional practice today.

results of the Eames practice; the masterworks: Case study presentations and critical dialogue

In depth research of several key masterworks throughout the Eameses career are presented by each student in a case study format. The goal of the presentations are to demonstrate how the Eames Office approached the design of a specific project and how they responded to the specific cultural, economic, technical, and aesthetic forces that shaped their decisions. A critical dialogue of the contemporary relevance and significance of this masterwork in relation to the Eames Office’s design methodologies and in comparison to professional practice today will follow all presentations.

immersion in the Eames practice: a field trip to directly experience the work

One of the most powerful experiences for each student in the Eames seminar will be our field trip to Los Angeles to visit the Eames Case Study House, original Herman Miller Showroom, Eames Office Gallery and current exhibitions. History will come to life and be made personal as each student visits the Eames House and other sites, and experiences first hand the richness of these landmarks of 20th century design.

formulate and implement your own new collaborative practice

One of the most important aspects of any life changing learning experience is the opportunity to reflect and apply your newly acquired knowledge and skills to your own life and practice. This will be achieved through the creation of a series of new collaborative practices or “offices” – comprised of 4-5 student partnerships. Each “office” will be asked to develop a philosophy of practice, office organization, and in turn execute two hands-on material investigations, with collaborative assistance from local manufacturers, fabricators, artisans and your office. In the past many of these new “offices” extended and challenged the normative professional office working methods that the students had previously experienced during their recent internships. Each student will come to understand and appreciate: why great practice happens, how it is brought about, and what it is.
requirements

"I don't believe in this 'gifted few' concept, just in people doing things they are really interested in doing. They have a way of getting good at whatever it is. The American educational system never tells the student that."

Charles Eames Norton Lecture #5, Harvard University, 29 March 1971.

It is assumed that every student in this seminar will take an active role in ensuring its excellent quality.

readings

Every student should complete all the required reading (listed below) and write a précis for each reading, outlining the major ideas and issues presented, and lingering questions raised. You should be prepared to engage in a critical dialogue of these précis everyday. Dialogue is the art of thinking together.

dialogues

Your active participation in the seminar dialogue is mandatory, without exception, so come prepared. Also see William Isaacs, Dialogue and the art of thinking together (New York: Currency 1999).

case study research: Oral presentation, and dialogue (individual or partnership)

After reviewing each of the proposed seminar topics, select one topic you would like to research in depth, give a presentation, and lead our seminar dialogues. The use of distributed laser printed outlines and illustrated PowerPoint or Keynote presentation is required. Your individual or collaborative partnership’s case study presentation and outline shall include:

I. A brief description of the selected case study – text and images.
II. What major ideas did Charles and Ray Eames explore in this case study?
III. What were the major design methods Charles and Ray Eames utilized?
IV. How were the larger connections made as the design and construction developed?
V. How were the specific elements and materials utilized and refined?
VI. Why are these specific ideas significant for contemporary design?

Each student and/or collaborative case study partnership will meet with the instructor during my office hours to review the their draft outline and digital presentation at least one week prior to its final presentation. Submission of your final case study presentation as a PDF for inclusion on our course website is required, for distribution within the course.

formulate and implement your own new collaborative practice: Collaborative Shop work

Upon reflection Charles Eames once shared with me that, "most significant learning comes from your own primary experiences." This simple idea - that the real moments of profound and personally significant learning most often occur when we are deeply involved with direct, hands-on experiences with life’s real world conditions and pressing problems - will become the focus of this semester long project assignment - the formation and field testing of your own collaborative practice or "office.” Each “office” will be asked to develop a set of core moral and ethical values, a philosophy of practice, office organization, design process and implement and test its success by executing two hands on material investigations.

First, in the hand tool investigation, your “office” will be asked to celebrate the nature of one single material using only hand tools and hand techniques. Secondly, in the power tool investigation, your “office” will be asked to celebrate the nature of one single material using only power tools and techniques. Each investigation will be serially documented with digital photography to allow your office to establish critical distance and re-evaluate the evolving work at hand (all steps in the process and out comes, drawings, mockups, meetings with consultants, etc). As the work progresses throughout the semester, your “office” is required to seek out and collaborate with local manufacturers, fabricators and artisans, whose extensive knowledge will inform and enhance each investigation and subsequent refinement.

Each office will present at our 3 pinups – a Pecha Kucha presentation (20 images x 20 sec each), and pin up 11x17” color prints of all 20 images, which summarize: 1) your office (i.e. include your office’s philosophy and core values that guide everything you do; an office organizational – staff/collaborators and their roles; 2) your office’s design process - a project flow chart - showing the key steps in your investigations; and 3) your proposed material investigation/s. Your office’s work will be serially documented with digital photography to allow your partnership to establish critical distance and re-evaluate the evolving work at hand (all steps in the process and out comes - drawings, montages, meetings, etc.).

Submission of your office’s 3 Pecha Kucha presentations as PDFs for inclusion on our course website is required.
text

"You have to teach children to have a genuine respect for a large number of events and objects which are not of immediate gain to them. It is the only thing which puts a human being in a situation where they can promptly assess the next step."


Ostroff, Daniel  An Eames Anthology: Articles, Film Scripts, Interviews, Letters, Notes, and Speeches  (Yale 2015).
Neuhart, Marilyn & John  The Story of Eames Furniture  (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010) 2 volumes.
Eames Office  www.eamesoffice.com
Eames Encyclopedia  www.eamesdesigns.com
Eames YouTube channel  www.youtube.com/user/EamesOffice/videos

grading

"One could be sure that in the past when a man would rise to the point of producing work of greater quality, it was not through any conscious attempt to excel but rather because he cared about what work he was doing - he was committed to his work. This has become something rare - because being committed means becoming involved and to become involved means giving something of oneself. It is only the rare ones today who seem to care that much. Yet, that quality that makes for excellence - that commitment- is more important to us today on a daily operational basis than perhaps ever before. At least one of the reasons this is true is quite simple. The nature of the problems we face changes even as we work with them. We cannot tell from what disciplines or from what art of preparation for the next step will come. We cannot fall back on the lore of the art because that lore does not exist. There is however, a tradition that is held in common by natural philosophers, explorers, pioneer woodsmen- anyone who is in his daily life has been compelled to face new problems. That is tradition of respect and concern for the properties and the quality of everything in the world around them. To excel in the structuring of a problem we must be committed to a concern for quality in everything in the world around us. We must learn to care deeply."


Work in the Office of Charles and Ray Eames was "a difficult form of play." The "design problems" were always mentally and physically absorbing, challenging and demanding for everyone involved. Such will be the case in this seminar. Once under way, each student's level of excitement and motivation to explore the connections between the Eameses and their own personal interests will be contagious and fueled the overall level of inquiry and dialogue. Throughout the semester, each student will be consulted and evaluated on their personal growth, in terms of the depth of their research, quality of their intellectual inquiry, and the quality of the work produced.

case study presentation  50%  Late work will not be accepted
material investigations  40%
In-class dialogue – daily preparedness and participation  10%

Any act of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, will result in your automatic failure of the course, and a final grade of XE "failure due to academic dishonesty" recorded, which will permanently remain on your ASU transcript. Please review the ASU Student Code of Conduct, www.asu.edu/studentlife/judicial

"Do not take any job with whose objectives you do not agree, and don't take a job as a stepping stone to something else."

Charles Eames Norton Lecture #5, Harvard University, 29 March 1971.

acknowledgments

"Choose your corner, pick away at it carefully, intensely and to the best of your ability and that way you might change the world."

Charles Eames Norton Lecture #5, Harvard University, 29 March 1971.

The overall success of this seminar lies with the many individuals who unselfishly give of their time to engage in our critical investigation and dialogues. I would like to acknowledge the following individuals whose efforts made this seminar a reality. This seminar is dedicated to their tireless efforts to celebrate the rich experiences of life and the collaborative practice of design at the highest level.

Charles and Ray Eames
The staff of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames (1941-1978), including Michael Underhill.
The artisans and master craftsmen of The Design School Workshop.
Numerous local manufacturers, fabricators, and artisans who assisted the students in their material investigations.
readings

week I

great practice: the worlds of Charles and Ray Eames

? An Eames Celebration (NY: WNET, 3 February 1975) (film 90 min.).
Cohn, Jason Eames: the architect and the painter (NY: WNET American Masters 2011).
Eames Office www.eamesoffice.com
Smithson, Alison & Peter "An Eames Celebration" Architectural Design September 1966 (Special issue on the Eames Office).

week II

awakening consciousness

Mau, Bruce "An Incomplete Manifesto For Growth" I.D. Magazine March April 1999, pp. 36-38.

Charles (1907-1978) and Ray (1912-1988)

? NBC Today show interview with Charles and Ray Eames 1956 (film 15 min.).

week II

goods + things

Smithson, Allison "And now Dhamas are dying out in Japan" Architectural Design September 1966, pp. 447-449.
Smithson, Peter "Just a few Chairs and a House" Architectural Design September 1966, pp. 443-446.
**week III**

**work + play - the Eames design process**

Eames, Charles & Ray


Eames, Charles


Eames, Charles

"Design Today" *California Arts and Architecture* September 1941, pp. 18-19.

Eames, Charles


Eames, Lucia


Demetrios, Eames


Demetrios, Eames


Bernstein, Jeremy


McCullough, Jane

"Some thoughts about Eames" *Zodiac* Volume 8, 1961, pp. 122-125.

**week IV**

**901 – the Eames office**

Demetrios, Eames

*901: After 45 Years of working* (Santa Monica: Pyramid, 1989) (film 28 min).

Eames, Ray


Eames, Charles


Demetrios, Eames


Demetrios, Eames


Demetrios, Eames

"If the Office were an Island" *An Eames Primer* (New York: Universe, 2001) pp. 215-225.

Neuhart, Marilyn & John


Caplan, Ralph


Lacy, Bill

"Warehouse Full of Ideas" *Horizon* September 1980.

Gingerich, Owen


Halpern, Francis

"Have a Chair, Please" *Westways* November 1976, pp. 30-34.

McQuade, Walter

"Charles Eames Isn't Resting on His Chair" *Fortune* February 1975, pp. 96-105 & 144-145.

Goldberger, Paul


Webb, Michael


?  


**week V**

**photography + slide shows**

Eames, Charles & Ray


Eames, Charles & Ray


Eames, Charles & Ray


Demetrios, Eames


Eames, Charles


Neuhart, John & Marilyn


Demetrios, Eames


Colomina, Beatriz


Colomina, Beatriz

**week VI**

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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eames &amp; Saarinen</td>
<td>“Organic Design: Winning Furniture Designs” California Arts and Architecture Dec 1941 pp. 16-17 (MOMA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuhart, Marilyn &amp; John</td>
<td>The Story of Eames Furniture (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010)(2 volumes) Survey all the Eames furniture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirkham, Pat</td>
<td>The Eames Lounge Chair: An Icon of Modern Design (London: Merrell, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuhart, John</td>
<td>Eames House (Berlin: Ernst &amp; Sohn, 1994).</td>
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<td>Papademetriou, Peter</td>
<td>&quot;A Magic Box&quot; Casabella December 1998, pp. 120-126 (Entenza House - Case Study #9).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steele, James</td>
<td>Eames House (London: Phaidon, 1994).</td>
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**week IX**

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<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eames, Charles</td>
<td>&quot;Charles Eames Designs: Coloring Toy&quot; Design November 1953, p. 53,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haber, Michael</td>
<td>&quot;Designed for Play&quot; Graphis March 1958, pp. 126-130.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gueff, Olga</td>
<td>&quot;For Alcoa’s Forecast Program, Eames Creates a Sun Machine that Accomplishes Nothing&quot; Interiors April 1958, pp. 82-83.</td>
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<td>Week X</td>
<td>Films + Communication</td>
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<td>Demetrios, Eames</td>
<td>&quot;Ray Eames&quot; California Arts and Architecture September 1943, p. 16.</td>
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<td>Kirkham, Pat</td>
<td>&quot;Mathematica&quot; Museum 1974, volume 26, #2, pp. 86-98.</td>
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<td>Eames, Ray</td>
<td>&quot;Ray Eames&quot; California Arts and Architecture September 1943, p. 16.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demetrios, Eames</td>
<td>Powers of Ten Interactive (Los Angeles: Pyramid, 1999) CD-ROM.</td>
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"There's a parable I'd like to share . . . In India, sort of the lowest, the poorest, those without and the lowest in caste, eat very often--particularly in southern India--they eat off of a banana leaf. And those a little bit up the scale, eat off of a sort of a low-fired ceramic dish. And a little bit higher, why, they have a glaze on--a thing they call a "tali"--they use a banana leaf and then the ceramic as a tali upon which they put all the food. And there get to be some fairly elegant glazed talis, but it graduates to--if you're up the scale a little bit more--why, a brass tali, and a bell-bronze tali is absolutely marvelous, it has a sort of a ring to it. And then things get to be a little questionable. There are things like silver-plated talis and there are solid silver talis and I suppose some nut has had a gold tali that he's eaten off of, but I've never seen one. But you can go beyond that and the guys that have not only means, but also a certain amount of knowledge and understanding, go the next step and they eat off of a banana leaf. And I think that in these times when we fall back and regroup, that somehow or other, the banana leaf parable sort of got to get working there, because I'm not prepared to say that the banana leaf that one eats off of is the same as the other eats off of, but it's that process that has happened within the man that changes the banana leaf. And as we attack these problems--and I hope and I expect that the total amount of energy used in this world is going to go from high to medium to a little bit lower--the banana leaf idea might have a great part in it."

Charles Eames Norton Lecture #1, Harvard University, 26 October 1971.