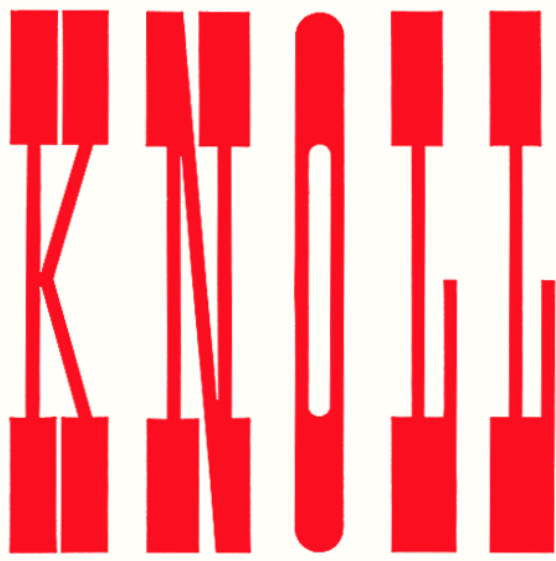




Corporate Identity by Herbert Matter

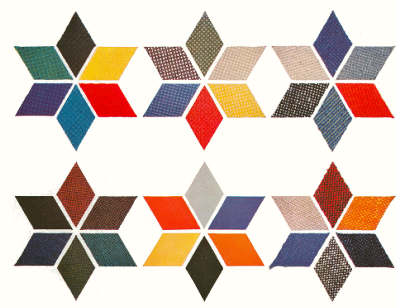
Poster by Darren Lee

After the events of WWII, many aspects of American life began to shift, and Knoll Furniture was no exception. With the rise of new technologies, graphic design became more progressive than ever, and corporations such as Knoll Furniture began to realize its worth. "The visual identification systems that began during the 1950s went far beyond trademarks or symbols. . . . By unifying all communications from a given organization into a consistent design system, [a cohesive] image could be projected, and the design system enlisted to help accomplish specific corporate goals" (Meggs & Purvis 399). With this in mind, Hans Knoll's new wife Florence Knoll took control of the company, and began looking for new way

to rebrand it. Because of Knoll's focus on elegant and innovative design in furniture, a strong graphics program was necessary to reflect this image. Swiss graphic designer Herbert Matter was enlisted to the job, and quickly melded his bold, modernistic style with the company's corporate identity. Herbert Matter's first task was to create a new logo for the company. A bold yet elegant design was necessary to stand out, while versatility in use remained paramount for publications and other marketing materials. Matter's response was an geometric logo that focused on form, using an elongated slab-serif typeface to provide weight and draw focus. Eventually, this was simplified to the minimalistic "K".



Womb Chair ad by Herbert Matter, 1955. This ad ran in the New Yorker for 13 years.



Next, Matter began working on advertising material and prints for the company. These works are some of his most iconic and cutting edge; Knoll Furniture granted Herbert Matter the creative freedom to experiment with new techniques that put Knoll Furniture at the forefront of modern design never before seen by the public. Matter's first advertisement, the Chimney Sweep, depicted a worker dressed in black with a face covered in soot sitting in a red Saarinen Womb Chair. This advertisement's stark contrast of elegant and dirty elements uniquely captured the quality of the chair and fabric while appealing to a wider audience. It went on to run in the New Yorker for thirteen years.



Executive Chair ad by Herbert Matter. Reflects the designer's mastery of form, sculpture, and collage.

Over time, Matter began to experiment more and more with these advertisements using his own unique style. Almost all of his advertisements relied on a strong base of photography and photomontage; by combining bold, dramatic typefaces, the K logo, and highly manipulated images laid on top of each other, Matter created sharp composites that looked fresh, clean, and edgy. He went on to introduce new techniques in the darkroom, such as overprinting, which has since been adopted by the industry. Another style pioneered by Matter was the use of biomorphic forms, which took on abstract shapes in monochromatic scenes to create uniquely geometric and striking compositions. Herbert Matter's work at Knoll Furniture shaped its corporate identity of a clean, forward-thinking, and modernistic company with a strong emphasis on design. Furthermore, his work impacted the modernist movement and graphic design as a whole. A quote from Paul Rand describes why Matter's work was so influential:

"HERBERT MATTER IS A MAGICIAN."

To satisfy the needs of industry, that's what you have to be. Industry is a tough taskmaster. Art is tougher. Industry plus Art, almost impossible. . . . His work of '32 could have been done in '72, or even in '82. It has that timeless, unerring quality one recognizes instinctively."



Butterfly Chair catalogue by Herbert Matter from Knoll Index of Designs, 1950.

List of resources:

Knoll.com; Herbert Matter: Defining Knoll
Knoll.com; Happy Birthday Herbert Matter!

Typeroom.eu; How Herbert Matter's innovative typography shaped the visuals of a century

The moderns: midcentury American graphic design by Steven Heller & Greg D'Onofrio

Graphic design visionaries by Caroline Roberts

Meggs's history of graphic design, Philip B. Meggs