



# **HENRY DREYFUSS**

*Humanist and Tastemaker*

## Who was Henry Dreyfuss?



**“Man achieves his highest  
measure of serenity when  
surrounded by beauty.”**

# Who was Henry Dreyfuss?

B. 1904, BROOKLYN, NY

1921 – 1927



## SETTING THE STAGE

After learning stage design in high school, Dreyfuss begins producing sets on Broadway, first for silent film theaters and later for plays.

*(Pictured: The Cat and the Fiddle, which he created in 1931.)*

1927



## WAYFINDING ABROAD

He sails to visit Tunis and Algiers, moonlighting briefly as a tourguide with American Express. Staying in Paris on his way home, he receives a surprise job offer from Macy's to enhance their merchandising.

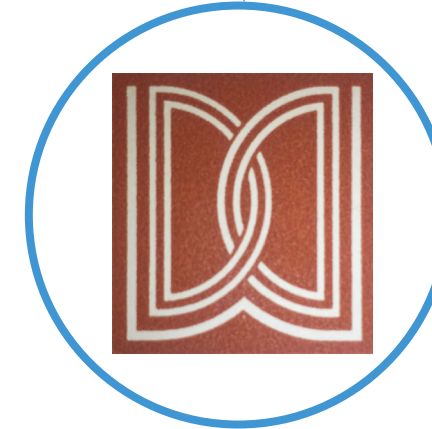
1929



## "CAN YOU MAKE THIS LOOK PRETTY?"

Dreyfuss discovers he wants to do more than add superficial appeal to a finished store product. He wants to help design products from the start, teaming up directly with the manufacturer in the process.

1929



## CHARTING A NEW COURSE

To do practice his new way of working, he opens his own firm in New York. He continues set production and designs a variety of products.

*"An honest design job should flow from the inside out, not from the outside in."*

## How did he design for people?

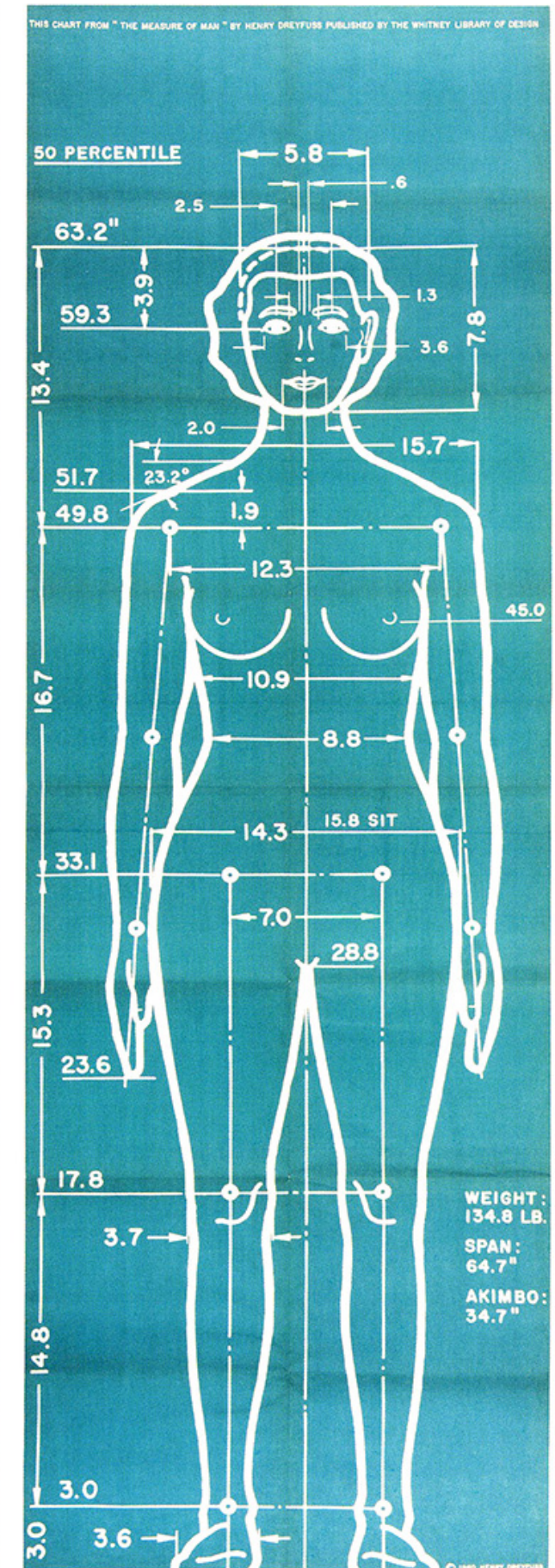
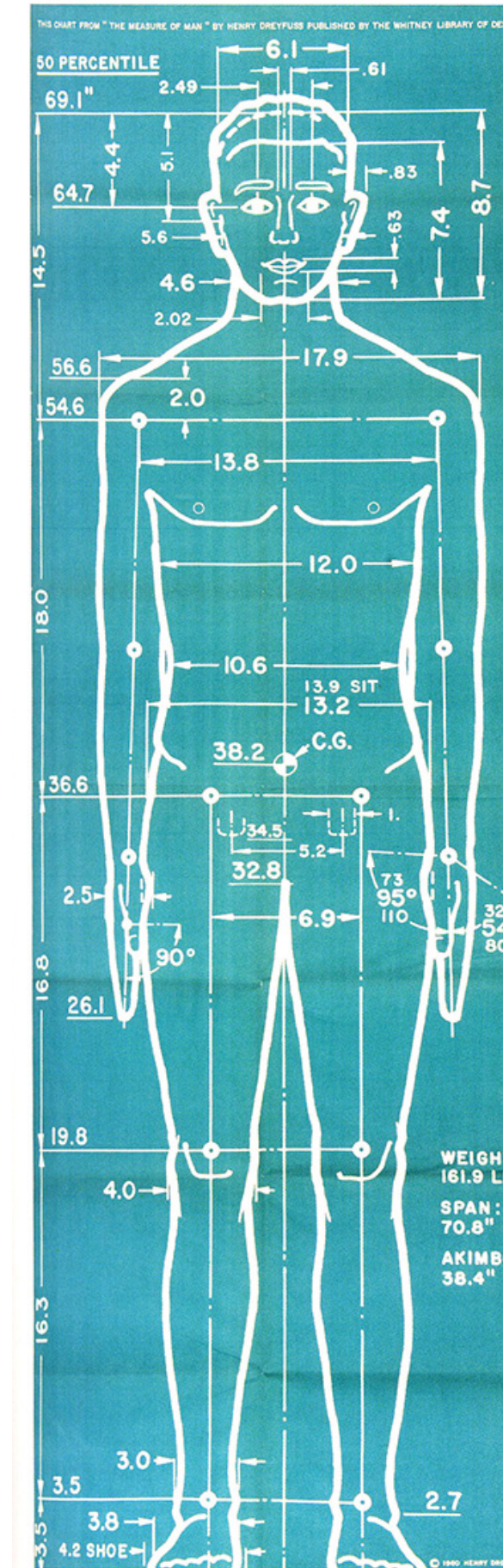
# Placing Usability at the Heart of Design

*How Dreyfuss pioneered a new understanding of human bodies, behaviors and needs*

We hear “empathy” everywhere in design today, but Dreyfuss actually practiced it in his work decades ago. He lived by the concept that:

*what we are working on is going to be ridden in, sat upon, looked at, talked into, activated, operated, or in some way used by people individually or en masse. ... If .... people are made safer, more comfortable, more eager to purchase, more efficient — or just plan happier — the designer has succeeded.*

To focus on human needs, he personified users into two life-sized figures, Joe and Josephine, “our hero and heroine.” This couple and their children represented the assorted measurements of American consumers at the time. Endearingly, he imagined each mundane detail of their lives with tenderness, care and an exactingly scientific approach to measurement, testing and iteration.



JOE AND JOSEPHINE by Henry Dreyfuss Associates, MIT Press, 1974.

# How did he design for people?

Dreyfuss initially pulled data from the military for men's measurements, and information from the fashion industry for women's. Ultimately, his firm would spend many years researching both users' physicality and their psychology.

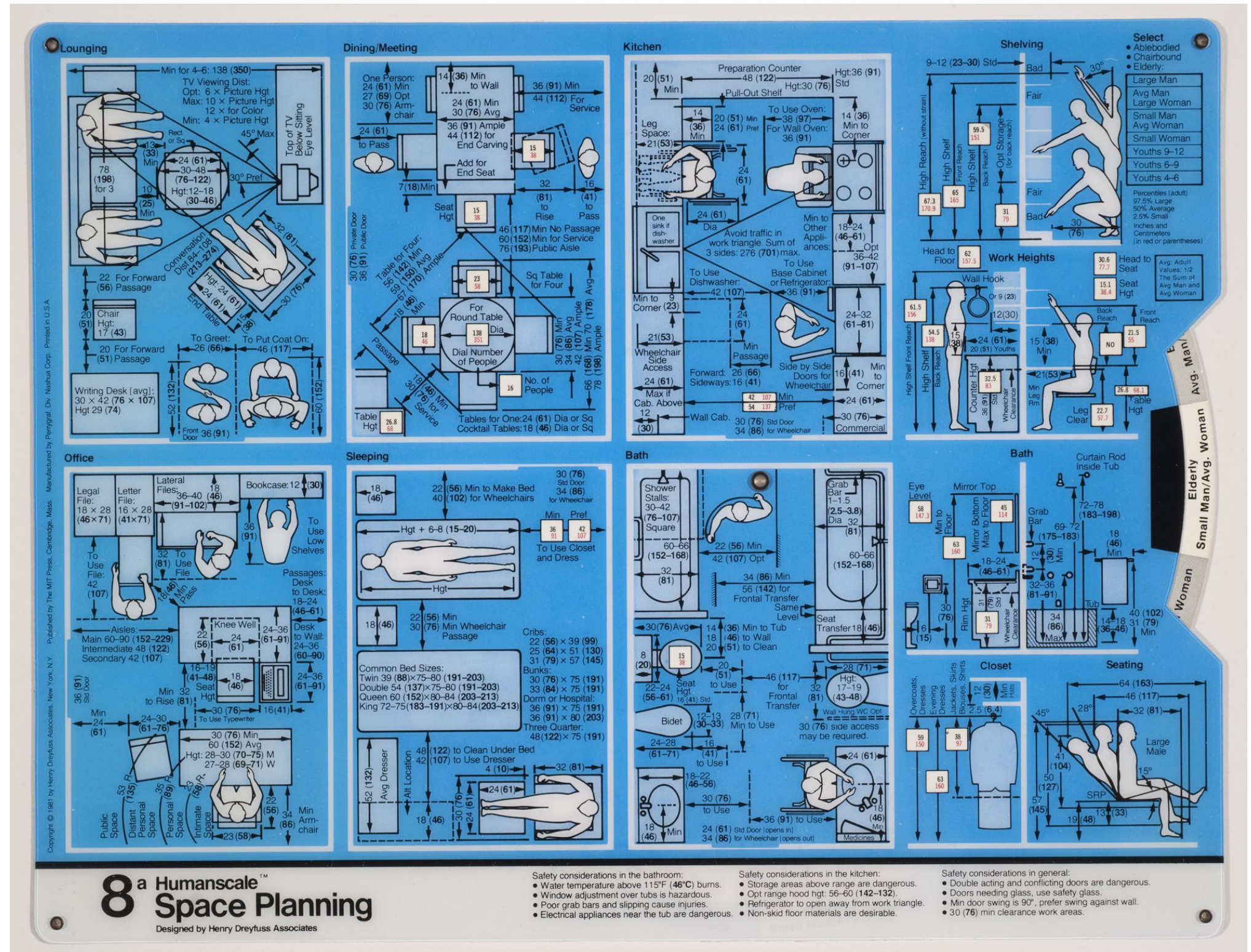
In a sense, Dreyfuss' early experience crafting sets on Broadway continued to shape his life as an industrial designer: he dedicated his life to making the world a stage for human comfort.

He urged his team to observe and respond to users, in all their human shapes, sizes, and complexities, acting across a multitude of settings:

*No matter what they are doing, we observe their every position and reaction. They are part of our staff, representing the millions of consumers for whom we are designing, and they dictate every line we draw.*

His firm, Henry Dreyfuss Associates, produced a series of iconic design manuals that serve as touchstones for professionals across many sectors.

Through his company's work, he aimed to "[fill] the gaps between human behavior and machine design," and ultimately, to "make Joe and Josephine compatible with their environment."

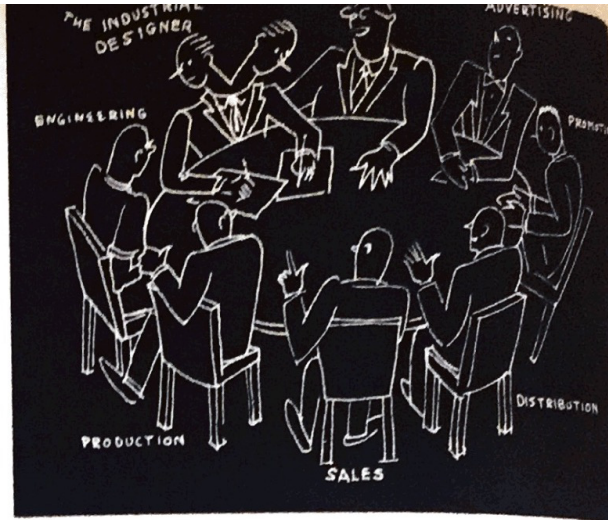


**HUMANSCALE: A PORTFOLIO OF INFORMATION** "Space Planning," plate from Henry Dreyfuss Associates and Niels Diffrient, Alvin R. Tilley, and Joan C. Bardagiy, *Humanscale 7 / 8 / 9* : A Portfolio of Information (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1974.; diagram 8a. TA166.D5 ( ID:86-B8391)

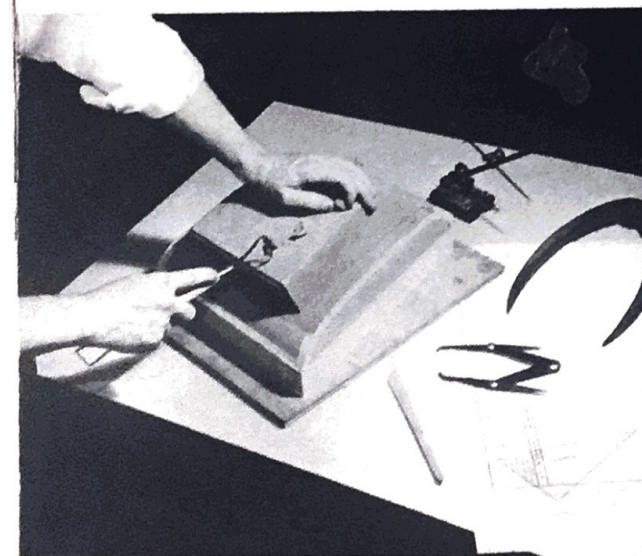
## What did his process look like in practice?



**1.** When the industrial designer is summoned by a potential client he must first conscientiously determine that he can make a positive contribution to the product. If, after study and consultation, it is found that he can, the following sequence of events is set in motion.



**2.** A meeting is held with the executive group, composed of department heads, to learn their objectives in terms of time, cost, techniques, and distribution. Only in this way can the industrial designer be sure that his ideas jibe with the practical facts of business life.



**5.** The industrial designer enters into close co-operation with the client's engineering personnel. Their offices become as one. Together they go over countless sketches, working drawings, and blueprints. Three-dimensional models are developed in clay, plaster, wood, or plastic.



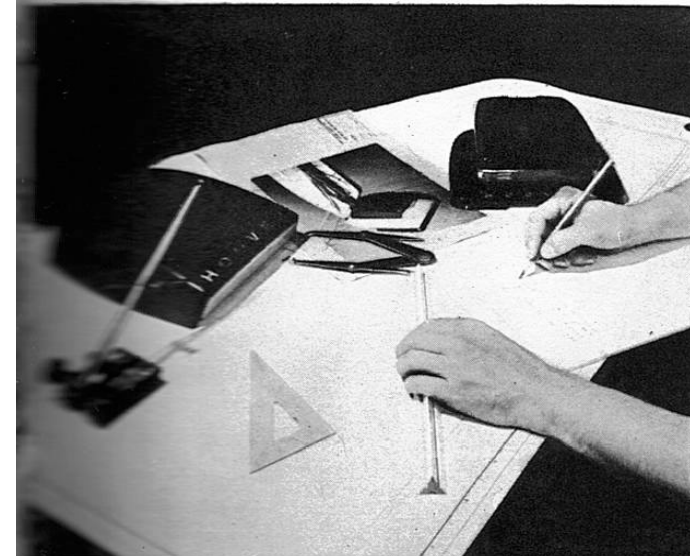
**6.** The final model—a working one, if possible—is presented to the entire client group by the industrial designer and the client engineers. The presentation is designed to show management what they will get, when they will get it, and what it will sell for.



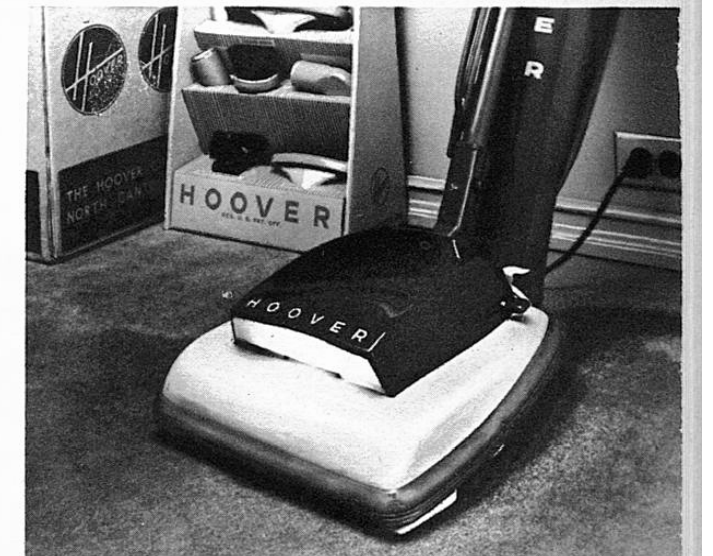
**3.** A thorough study is made of the market. The industrial designer assembles photographs of competitive lines. Often rival products are purchased and operated. Although the client, naturally, is cognizant of his competition, the designer sees it through different eyes.



**4.** Time is allocated to the study of factory methods and production facilities. This insures the industrial designer's becoming acquainted with any limitations that may exist, so he won't project a product that cannot be manufactured efficiently.



**7.** Agreement on a final working model is a milestone, but the industrial designer's work is far from done. He continues to work with the engineers and toolmakers, making every effort to integrate changes if they will improve the product or the price picture.



**8.** If the product is to be packaged, the industrial designer goes to work on the container, carton, and price tags. He interests himself in these matters because they complement the product. Often they create the invaluable first impression in the mind of the customer.

## Object Lesson: How did he reinvent the phone?

### Combining Imagination with a New Science

*Seeing the potential for “magic” in the form of a seemingly-ordinary black box*

A century ago, phones were boring, black boxes of metal or bakelite, issued as standard by the giant telephone service companies. Even then, Dreyfuss expressed a childlike sense of wonder about them. Rather than seeing the object as a mere utility, he marveled at it as “a magic box with which you could summon anyone from anywhere.”

Bell Laboratories commissioned him to design a phone for use across their expansive networks. In 1937, his first, Model 302, morphed the box into an artful sculpture. Dreyfuss gave the new model sleek curves and a graceful cradle for the handset.

Over time, his design researchers found that users frequently wedged their phones between their heads and shoulders, and the curvaceous little handset would fall out easily. They also found that people sometimes fumbled for the buttons through the rotary cover, and that the base would move too easily from the table.

In a revolutionary step, the team began to actually apply the measurements of people’s bodies to their designs. How long is the distance between a person’s ear and their mouth? How might the phone comfortably accommodate many people’s shapes and sizes? They looked to military data and their own collected samples to find out. They would pioneer a new science called “anthropometry,” or the measurement of people.

With their next iteration, Model 500, in 1949. With it, his team made a few un-glamorous, but practical changes: easier access to numbers, a sturdier handset, and a base whose shape Dreyfuss humorously called “the lumpy rectangle.” This model became increasingly popular for office use.



## Object Lesson: How did he reinvent the phone?

Dreyfuss' vision of the phone's magic truly began to sparkle with the 1959 premier of the Princess phone. As women began to take on a more active role in using the phone both at home and at work, demand grew for a smaller, lighter version. During the war, the project was paused, development accelerated.

The design researchers on Dreyfuss' team noticed that many users, especially teenage girls, liked to lounge on their beds while talking, and they made it more easily portable than the other models. Design critic Ellen Lupton also likens the shape and color to a "reclining nude," hinting at the eros that a phone might intimate or enable in the lives of its users. In this case, the phone served as a household appliance primarily for social calls.

The Princess was the first phone to come in a variety of hues — rather than black — and to take on its own identity as a fashion accessory with an aura of enchantment. With the marketing line, "It's little, it's lovely, it lights up!" it captured the hearts of many teenage girls.

Much later, it would indirectly inspire the design of the seductive mobile devices that bewitch us today, and whose role we see as deeply personal in all of our lives.




This lovely little phone goes tastefully in any bedroom. It saves time and steps whenever there are calls to make or take. Keep it within arm's reach on a desk or by a favorite chair.



## To Each Her Own Princess

Nowadays you see Princess phones in the nicest bedrooms of the nicest homes. They fill the need for an extension, and fill it beautifully. Why not a Princess for you,

or for someone in your family? Call the Business Office or ask your telephone man.

Bell Telephone System 



The dial lights up when you lift the receiver. You can make calls in the dark, or when light is subdued. By the bedside a Princess phone gives daytime comfort, nighttime security.

A Princess of her own means privacy for a teen-ager, peace and quiet for parents. There's a choice of decorator colors — white, beige, pink, blue or turquoise. A small separate ringer goes neatly on the baseboard.





## How did he want us to experience the world?



## Democratizing the Experience of Beauty

*Erasing barriers to artistic experiences through thoughtfully designing for the masses*

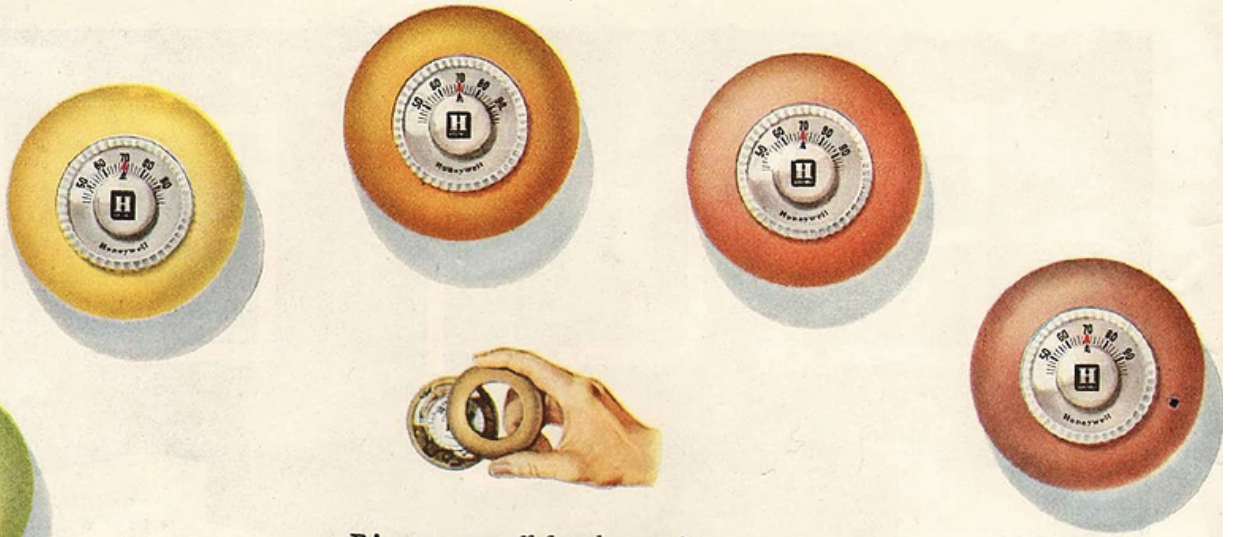
Henry Dreyfuss cared deeply about people's aesthetic and emotional responses to the tangible objects and physical environments he created. He felt Americans needed fresh opportunities to tangibly experience transformative moments in their lives, of pleasure and vitality within otherwise everyday routines and milieux:

*It is my contention that well-designed, mass-produced goods constitute a new American art form and are responsible for the creation of a new American culture. These products of the applied arts are a part of everyday American living and working, not merely museum pieces to be seen on a Sunday afternoon.*

*I find no basic conflict between those who appreciate the fine arts and those who respond to classic examples of the applied arts. They are stirred by the same impulse, a desire for beauty.*

He took his stated mission very seriously. As he studied all kinds of consumers — from homemakers to gas station attendants to diplomats — he designed an incredibly diverse array of goods and settings.

As much as he cherished functionality, he never wanted life to feel perfunctory. Dreyfuss wanted each person he served to feel some transcendence from the ordinary.



### Ring snaps off for decorating

A modest pull is all it takes to remove the cover of the Honeywell Round. Long-life spring steel clips hold it firmly in place when you snap it on again.

## A new improved thermostat



### It's easy to paint

In just a few minutes the silver-bronze plastic cover can be easily painted to match your color scheme. No special paints are required.



### Actual size

New, more visible dial and temperature indicators make settings easier. The Honeywell Round is available through any heating dealer.

**\$12<sup>80</sup>** plus small installation cost

\*A base plate (not shown) is also available at slight extra cost to cover any hole left by old-fashioned installation.