



## THE PACIFICA STORY

Spring 1996 marked an anniversary for Pacifica Designs. Forty-four years ago—in April 1952—HOUSE AND GARDEN magazine devoted 36 pages and the cover of its April issue to the Pacifica concept developed by Harry Jackson of Oakland, California, and LIFE magazine featured three pages of pictures of a house in the Pacifica theme.

Ten years later, in the Spring of 1962, Jackson established a design operation in the Orient and was the first American retailer to open an outlet in Japan—preceding Pierre Cardin and Rosenthal China into Takashimaya, Tokyo's famed department store. Jacksons/Japan then added shops featuring "Asian-inspired furniture designs of western function" in Osaka and Yokohama.

"I began developing designs for the Japanese market because traditionally Japan had very little furniture, just a few low lacquered tables," he explained. "With growing interest by the Japanese in the western style of living, our designs were more suited to the beauty and simplicity of their architecture. In effect, we designed furniture as the Japanese would have designed furniture had they designed furniture which they did not do."

An economics graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Jackson holds a master's degree in business from Stanford University. He first saw Japan, China, Hong Kong and The Philippines in 1939. After three years of service in the Pacific in World War II, Jackson returned to California in 1945 with a heightened interest in the simple, uncluttered architecture of the Far East. Joining a family-owned furniture business in Oakland—a business that later included stores in San Francisco, Berkeley, Walnut Creek, Hayward, Vallejo and Sacramento—he soon added Far Eastern imports to the Jackson inventory.

"Social and economic factors are constantly changing our taste," he pointed out at the time, noting that handcrafted, high-priced pieces influence the designing of furniture aimed at the average income level.

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Combining ideas from contemporary architecture, from his years in the Orient, and from changing economic standards, Jackson developed the Pacifica concept, a styling theme that emphasized the simple and natural, avoiding the mechanistic, cold, sterile and structural aspects of earlier modern design.

Drawing on design characteristics from Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, Japan, China and The Philippines, Jackson proposed adaptation of these old Pacific cultures into a new home furnishings concept, one that would both reflect and affect our way of life. In keeping with the lower ceilings of contemporary architecture, he said, furniture should be lower; to complement the development of picture windows and sliding doors, interior colors should relate to the out-of-doors. Servantless homes should be easy to care for, and fabrics should be elegant enough for entertaining but simple enough—and sturdy enough—for day-to-day use.

In addition, Jackson stressed the concept of "separates" rather than ensembles—a theme he has continued to expound throughout his career.

In March of 1951, Jackson sought and won approval of the California Home Fashion Group—a consortium of 30 furniture manufacturers in Southern California—for a coordinated design, manufacturing and marketing program to be called "Pacifica."

"The taste level of the American public has risen greatly in the last few years, and unfortunately the home furnishings industry has not kept pace," he told the manufacturers. "There is a tremendous need for furniture and accessories to fill the demand for good design in these fields, and manufacturers can play a dramatic part in meeting it."

Jackson said the cultures bordering the Pacific had many contributions to make to architecture, interior design and fashion, among them simplicity, utility and comfort. In accordance with those principles, home furnishings acceptable for the Pacifica label should be adaptable to casual living, simple in form and decoration, rich in texture, and above all, natural and original.

In adopting the Pacifica concept, manufacturers agreed to submit designs for acceptance according to the criteria outlined. In October, the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* reported, "Jackson was a man of ideas and dreams, not a designer . . . yet designers agreed to submit their personal interpretations of the new design theme to him for Pacifica designation. Pacifica became a word symbolizing naturalism, representing informal, casual and comfortable living."

The *New York Retailing Daily* for the same day carried the headline, "Coast Show Makes Fashion News." The *San Francisco Chronicle*, under the headline, "The Pacific Begets Simple Furniture," said, "If you find yourself lost among Bauhaus, Swedish, Chinese, International, functional and fantastic, the Pacifica furniture is one guide to good design."

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In December, Jackson told the *Retailing Daily*, "To me, fashion is phoney unless it fills a basic need." Noting that architecture is the greatest single influence on the design of furniture, he arranged for Bay Area architects to lecture to his sales staff and took the latter into homes of the architects' clients to study the interaction of architecture and interior design.

Within a year of its introduction, Pacifica had won national coverage in HOUSE AND GARDEN, LIFE, INTERIORS, and the WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION, in trade magazines and in newspapers from California to New York. Described as "a theme incorporating cultures of the Pacific rim into the American lifestyle," it affected the design of furniture, floor coverage, fabrics and accessories.

In New York, the Home Fashions Group awarded Jackson its Trail Blazer Award for 1951 for developing a "strong, new design trend isolated for the first time." Said the award, "We are studying how life in the islands parallels life in California . . . and trying to adapt . . . these (design) concepts to the growing need for casualness and informality throughout the United States."

In March 1952, Trader Vic introduced "Pacifica Punch" to honor the opening of a Pacifica show at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. The show included room settings, photographs, floor and wall treatments, fabrics, furniture and accessories.

Named 1952 Retailer by the National Retail Furniture Association, Jackson was featured in HOUSE AND GARDEN in April. At the same time, LIFE featured a Pacifica house built by architect Jon Konigshofer for \$10,000. Jackson stores furnished the two-bedroom house, on a hillside in Carmel, for under \$3,000.

Saying, "Most of us in the trade call it Jackson's Pacifica," the April issue of INTERIORS reported that Pacifica had spread to 13 leading stores across the country and prompted the Museum of Pennsylvania to put on an exhibition of South Seas art.

ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE for June reported, "Pacifica has been a very successful attempt . . . to state a way of living in terms of the objects that create the environment within a house . . . achieving pleasant informality in present day servantless living . . . making these objects available on a practical basis and at reasonable prices. Some of the best talent . . . progressive and contemporary-minded manufacturers and distributors have become associated . . . in a new method of merchandising.

"The amazing response to the entire (Pacifica) project is evidence of a growing public demand that is often more progressive than the attitudes of those whose commercial purpose it is to supply such a demand."

Reporting the consumer viewpoint, WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION referred to Pacifica furnishings as "casual, friendly, and uncomplicated."

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At the Summer Furniture Mart in Los Angeles, Jackson won the Western Achievement Award in the home furnishings field. That Fall, a Pacifica house complete with garden and swimming pool was featured at the center of more than 150 exhibits at San Francisco's Giant Home Show in the Civic Auditorium, and the Crocker Art Gallery had a Pacifica exhibition in Sacramento. FORTNIGHT magazine, extolling Jackson's unique approach to merchandising, said, "Too many businessmen are grey men, with no sense of humor and no life."

In July Japan's INTERNATIONAL GRAPHICS pictured individual pieces and arrangements of Pacifica furnishings. In September the annual "Live As Well As You Look" show, a benefit for the Children's Hospital of the East Bay, had Pacifica as its theme.

Pacifica was established under its own organizational control in November of 1952 with Jackson responsible for acquainting the public with the Pacifica theme, for working with trade and consumer publications and for coordinating promotional and merchandising ideas.

That same month, *Retailing Daily* reported, "Pacifica 1953 carries on its theme of informal elegance . . . this year deriving primary design ideas from the small Japanese house." Shown to the trade and press at Jacksons in Oakland, the 1953 Pacifica collection inspired *Retailing Daily* to note that "Rich or poor, young or old, West Coasters' habits of life are strikingly similar."

In January 1953, Jackson told a breakfast meeting at the Chicago Merchandise Mart that the furniture industry is "Not as alert to the needs of the American public as it might be." He criticized what he called undue emphasis on coordinated groupings intended for use throughout the house. "I don't think that any one of us honestly believes that a home should be furnished in one line of furniture of one wood, one design, one texture, one color. Yet the manufacturer recommends a coordinated package and the retailer endorses it when he promotes it. I recognize that these packages make the marketing job easier, but we have probably lost sight of the best interest of the consumer. Too many products have been created and then justified. The justification should come before the design and production."

Six months later, HOUSE BEAUTIFUL featured "Decorating Separates," declaring them an old favorite in clothes but news in home furnishings.

The 1953 NATIONAL FURNITURE REVIEW said, "In spite of its strong Eastern influence, Pacifica is merely the springboard, the impetus for creation of new pieces essentially American in character and use . . . Pacifica is a model of an integrated merchandising program . . . a full-blown selling system encompassing every phase of home goods down to the linen and silver for the low dining tables."

"Teak, walnut, mahogany and metal are all used to high advantage - - and to traditionally Eastern grass matting, hemp and rattan have been blended the essentially American materials, plastic, linoleum and glass."

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"The functional aspect is inherent . . . to the credit of American designers and manufacturers, they have managed to distill the best and the most valuable quality of the Eastern brand influence, adapting them to further improve and enrich American living."

In the Fall of 1953, after discussing Europe's Art Nouveau of 1900, the American "Mission Style," the French "Moderne" and the Bauhauser movement in Germany, Santa Barbara College home economics instructor Marie Wilson said in an all-college lecture, "The Pacifica style evolved by Harry Jackson . . . is producing personality and character in our homes as never before. It is being an individual in a society dependent on mass production. An appreciation of the good is the only requirement."

Said FAMILY CIRCLE in August, "It took the vision and efforts of Harry Jackson of Oakland, California, to inspire designers, manufacturers and stores to bring to mainland American homes these simple, honest and original interpretations of Pacific Island furnishings." That Fall, I. Magnin showed a series of "at home" clothes bearing the Pacifica label and featured them in their windows and advertisements up and down the coast.

Jackson was further honored when New York's Museum of Modern Art asked that he serve as a juror on its Good Design Selection Committee with Florence Knoll and chaired by Edgar Kaufmann.

In the Spring of 1954, LIFE magazine featured a Sacramento model home, explaining that it had been designed and furnished by 44 Jackson employees "to thrash out problems of modern family life"—a project that converted to contemporary design 29 of the 39 staff members who had remained unreconstructed traditionalists throughout the Pacifica program.

The 1954 NATIONAL FURNITURE REVIEW declared that Jackson's Pacifica program, "had added a new perspective to today's retailing picture, won acclaim in the national press and captured customers' imagination from coast to coast."

The Pacifica theme of 1954 was drawn from redwood forests of the Northern California coast and showcased in a contemporary house in suburban Danville.

That was the year the ever-innovative Jackson introduced in LIFE "the hanging room" with everything but sofa cushions and ashtrays suspended from the ceiling. Still another LIFE story developed by Jackson featured a wide and colorful selection of hammocks not only reflected the function and informality of Pacifica, but represented the first furniture design indigenous to the western world.

Ironically, HOUSE AND GARDEN in October, extolled "The Wonderful Choice in Modern," noting interiors designed by Jacksons of California as being "in the Pacifica trend introduced by HOUSE AND GARDEN in April 1952."

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The 1956 Pacifica theme drawn from Mexican colonial and contemporary design was described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "pure, primitive and strong."

Nine years later, Jacksons of Oakland closed its doors. Harry Jackson kept Pacifica Designs and re-established at 633 Battery Street in San Francisco, where he returned to his earlier emphasis and pleasure in the simple, clean beauty of the classical Japanese home and furnishings.

"For years, I've been preaching that Americans should design houses as the Japanese do, smaller, but well thought-out," he said. "The Japanese have an exquisite ability to make a very small space look large. For centuries they have faced the building problems we face here today—the high cost of building materials and the need to make a limited area work well. Their gardens can be only 10 or 15 feet deep, and you feel that they go on forever."

For a number of years, Jackson served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the California College of Arts & Crafts, and co-founded and was President of the World Print Council.

Inevitably, Jackson's attention turned to the People's Republic of China. The culture of China had an increasingly strong influence as more Americans traveled to China, he said. A "China commuter" himself, Jackson was a director of China Consultants International and of the *International Industrial Report*, a Chinese-language magazine published as a joint venture with McGraw-Hill.

Designer, entrepreneur, ambassador-without-portfolio, "Lord Hari" has left his mark on the American home furnishings scene - - and on the Pacific cultures that inspired him.