

A USEFUL AND DECORATIVE HOME ACCESSORY:  
ERNEST SOHN CREATIONS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in the History of Decorative Arts and Design

MA Program in the History of Decorative Arts and Design  
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution  
and Parsons, The New School for Design  
2007

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## Preface

I dedicate this work to the memory of Ernest Sohn. I truly valued my few visits with this extraordinary gentleman. I also wish to thank his gracious wife Grete Sohn for all of her help.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my advisor Jennifer Goldsborough. Without her guidance, suggestions and careful editing this work could not have been produced. I thank her for encouraging my passion for ceramics and the rituals of dining and entertaining in her classes that I have been lucky enough to be a part of.

I also wish to thank the New York Public Library and its dedicated staff. Without the resources of this great institution and its accommodation of all those seeking knowledge I would not have been able to produce this historical account.

Finally I wish to thank all of my family and friends who have been invaluable in encouraging me and supporting me through the years of my education, research and writing. Without you all this could not have happened.

## Introduction

World War II was the pivot around which the twentieth century turned. Not only did it result in millions of lives lost and the redrawing of many national borders, but it created or hastened major changes in transportation, manufacturing, technology, general prosperity, customs, and countless other aspects of life. The art world has long been aware of the changes wrought by the numerous painters, architects, and sculptors who fled Europe in advance of the Nazi juggernaut, but less attention has been paid to the decorative arts designers who were part of this exodus and who inspired and implemented many of the enormous changes in consumer goods and life-styles.

Ernest Sohn fled the Nazi persecutions of his native Germany in 1936, coming to New York like so many other émigrés. With luck and determination Sohn quickly established a career and reputation within the gift industry. His unique design approach and focus on creating objects that were always utilitarian as well as decorative helped him become a leader in the field and a designer whose name sold products across the country. Sohn was able to create designs that bridged the gap between the most modern and avant-garde and the more conventional and historically based. He designed objects that fit in especially well with changes in American home life and entertaining in the post-war period. Ernest Sohn's design style was well suited to the exuberance and expansiveness of America after World War II.

The population of the United States in the twentieth century experienced a huge growth in prosperity. This was especially true for the expanding middle class that grew to prominence in the middle of the century. Part of this extraordinary prosperity was expressed in an ever greater quantity of material goods which soon filled the homes of

most Americans. Industry across the country and around the world worked to produce goods like cars, appliances and furniture to fill the needs and wants of middle-class Americans. One industry that rose to prominence in this century by appealing to the affluence and desires of Americans was the gift industry.

The idea of a shop or department within a major retail store dedicated to gifts, novelties and items that might be useful, but were also decorative, was new at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, gift shops and gift departments soon became mainstays of American life. Supplying these retail outlets was an industry that grew extraordinarily over the course of the century. Gift wholesalers, centered in cities like New York and Chicago, worked with manufacturers to create items to appeal to a fashion-conscious public with disposable income to spend. The industry used the new field of industrial design to help create new objects and novelties to sell to the American public. Countless items that had never before been imagined were given form and decoration that made them seem like necessities.

Soon after the gift industry began employing industrial designers to create new and interesting objects, the industry began to emphasize the fact that objects were artistically designed in their retailing. The names and reputations of designers became employed as brands and tools for sales. One name that became very prominent in the gift industry from the late 1930s through the late 1970s was that of Ernest Sohn.

This study of Sohn's life and work is divided into three major sections. The first will consider Ernest Sohn's youth and his first introduction to the gift industry, as well as his career before establishing his own business in 1951. This first section will also consider the history and structure of the gift industry itself.

The second section will explore Sohn's work and success in the 1950s upon the founding of his own business. During this period Sohn created objects that were primarily modern and utilitarian but softened by design touches that made them accessible to the tastes of a large middle-class market.

The third section will consider Sohn's design work in the 1960s and 1970s when he often incorporated more decorative effects and references to historical sources. This section will also discuss the ever-expanding gift industry which became much more of a big business during the period.

This thesis will provide a critical history and examination of the work of an important American commercial designer, Ernest Sohn. I also hope this study will add to the cultural and historical understanding of American decorative arts in the post-World War II period and will contribute to the understanding and expansion of post-war American cultural history.

## Chapter 1

Ernest Sohn, the first child of Siegfried and Francesca (Bender) Sohn, was born on October 28, 1913.<sup>1</sup> He was born near Antwerp where his father was the director of a branch for a German grain company. The family remained in Belgium through the First World War. After the war the Sohn family returned to their native Germany, settling near Mannheim in the southeast Palatinate region. The remainder of Ernest Sohn's youth during the turbulent inter-war period was spent in the Mannheim area.

Ernest Sohn grew up within an educated and well-to-do upper-middle class German Jewish family. Sohn counted amongst his ancestors a math professor at the royal house of Wurttemberg. The family was not particularly religious, with only his mother attending synagogue on important holidays. Sohn's father was a successful businessman working mostly in the grain industry as a commodity trader. Sohn's mother did not work and had the assistance of a live-in maid to keep the house and attend to her three boys. The family also enjoyed the cultural life of Mannheim, visiting museums and having regular subscriptions to the opera and orchestra.

In this comfortable environment Ernest Sohn enjoyed a happy childhood. In school he showed an early and strong talent in the visual arts, in particular drawing and painting. Sohn's mother, who was an amateur painter herself, encouraged this talent. Sohn recalled being left to his own devices in art classes since his work was often as good as the instructor's. In his later teens Sohn began doing portraiture and recalled being paid the equivalent of \$100 by a family for a portrait of their young girl who had recently died.

After graduating from high school Ernest Sohn enrolled in college in the neighboring town of Karlsruhe.<sup>2</sup> At the Karlsruher Technische Hochschule, or Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Sohn began studies in architecture.<sup>3</sup> The practical, technical training he was to receive here fit well with his father's expectations that he gain a useful education that would prepare him to work and support himself. It also allowed Sohn to integrate his love for and skill in art and drawing within his studies and anticipated future career. However, this education was cut short by the removal of all non-Aryan students from the school in 1933 after the National Socialists lead by Adolf Hitler gained control of the German government.

The years before Ernest Sohn emigrated to the United States were increasingly difficult for this young man and his family due to Nazi persecutions. Sohn continued to paint and found work as a clerk at a shipping company. Nazi officials removed Ernest Sohn's family from their home, throwing their belongings down from their third floor apartment. Sohn was excluded from the social club and gymnasium where he first met his future wife Grete on grounds that he was a non-Aryan. The Sohn family actively looked for ways to escape this increasingly dangerous environment. For Ernest Sohn this meant traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to New York City in 1936.

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this section was recorded in interviews by the author with Ernest Sohn on October 18 and November 21, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Karlsruhe see the online encyclopedia Wikipedia's entry on the subject: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karlsruhe>

<sup>3</sup> The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology is now the University of Karlsruhe (Universität Karlsruhe). Information about the university was taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Karlsruhe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Karlsruhe).

The first third of the twentieth century was also the initial period of development of the American gift industry of which Ernest Sohn was to become a leader.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a store or a department within a store devoted to gifts was one that grew to significance around the turn of the twentieth century. In a 1967 article the trade journal *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* acknowledged that the history of gift giving was as old as humanity itself, but emphasized that “Still, the gift and decorative accessories industry, as an *industry*, is a creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>5</sup> The first gift stores grew out of the stationery trade and china and glass trade.<sup>6</sup> Stationery stores began to sell small gift items and novelties, known as fancies. These gift items came to dominate the offerings of the stores as they evolved into this new breed of retail establishments. Paper goods, especially greeting cards, which also flowered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, became a large part of the offerings of most gift shops as they evolved. China and glass manufacturers often made the novelties and other small offerings of the early gift industry as a supplement to their tablewares and other lines.

It was not until the time of World War I that the gift industry reached early maturity. One marker that the industry had reached a critical mass was the founding of

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<sup>4</sup>This section is based primarily accounts of the history of the industry found in the trade journal *Gift and Art Buyer* (later *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*): Mary Ryan, “Looking Back Over Twenty Years,” *Gift and Art Buyer* 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 35-36, 130; Charles Brownlow, “Up Through the Years with the Retailer,” *Gift and Art Buyer* 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 37-38; *Gift and Art Buyer*, ed., “Our Market Places: Gift Shows and Permanent Displays,” 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 61-63, 126, 130; Cheney Archer, “It’s a Gift! An Industry is Born,” *Gift and Art Buyer*, 38, no. 10 (October 1942): 25-26, 126; *Gift and Art Buyer*, “The Story of the *Gift and Art Buyer*,” 38, no. 10 (October 1942): 51-53; *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Histories of the Gift Shows and Exhibit Buildings,” 53, no. 5 (May 1957): 69, 182-191; *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “A Great Industry and How It Grew,” 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 98-108.

<sup>5</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “A Great Industry and How It Grew,” 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 99.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the china and glass trade in the United States in this period see, Charles L. Venable, ed., *China and Glass in America, 1880-1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.) Of particular interest is Chapter 4, “From Warehouse to Your House: Tableware Marketing,” 285-323.

the trade journal *Gift and Art Shop* in 1917.<sup>7</sup> Geyer Publications had founded the journal *Geyer's Stationer* in 1877. *Geyer's Stationer* included a section each month on “fancy goods” and by 1917 the demand for this kind of information was so great that Geyer founded a separate magazine for this market.<sup>8</sup>

The structure of the gift industry also crystallized in this period.<sup>9</sup> Much of the trade was concentrated in New York, which had long been the leading American center for imports from Europe and other areas. Wholesalers or manufacturers' representatives dominated the trade. These “gift houses” would represent or wholesale the products of several manufacturers. Manufacturers' representatives usually employed a group of traveling salesmen.<sup>10</sup> Each salesman would be assigned specific areas of the country and would regularly call on contacts at department stores and gift shops, both developing a relationship and creating business for his “house.” In addition to its cadre of salesmen, manufacturers' representatives almost always maintained at least one permanent wholesale showroom. Early gift houses usually had their main showrooms in eastern cities with the greatest number concentrated in New York. With the opening of the Merchandise Mart in Chicago in 1931 this city joined New York as a major center for the gift trade with gift wholesalers concentrated on the building's fifteenth floor.<sup>11</sup> Buyers, especially those from large and influential retailers like Marshall Field and Company in

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<sup>7</sup> The *Gift and Art Shop* was renamed *Gift and Art Buyer* in 1934 and then *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* in 1963 and continues to chronicle the trade under that title to the present.

<sup>8</sup> This section is based on *Gift and Art Buyer*, “The Story of the *Gift and Art Buyer*,” 38, no. 10 (October 1942): 51-53.

<sup>9</sup> The information on the structure of the gift industry is based on the author's extensive perusal of trade publications such as *Gift and Art Shop*, *Gift and Art Buyer*, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, *Giftwares*, and *Crockery and Glass Journal* dating from the late 1930s through the late 1970s.

<sup>10</sup> The author uses “salesmen” purposefully—virtually all traveling sales people in this period were men.

Chicago and B. Altman in New York, were the other key figures and tastemakers in the gift industry. What influential buyers bought and featured often was noticed both in the trade press as well as being chronicled in popular magazines and newspapers.

In addition to wholesale showrooms in key cities, manufacturers' representatives and buyers would regularly attend trade shows.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps most important to the gift trade was the Chicago Gift Show, founded in 1921 and held during one week each February and August; and the New York Gift Show, founded 1928 and also held one week each February and August.<sup>13</sup> This semi-annual schedule of shows set a certain rhythm to the year with new offerings introduced in winter and supplements and updates added for the summer shows. Other shows grew up across the country including the third major semi-annual exhibition occurring in Los Angeles beginning in 1935.

Ernest Sohn's entry into the gift industry was, quite literally, from the bottom up.<sup>14</sup> After immigrating to the United States in June 1936 he got a job working for Weil-Freeman, a manufacturer's representative, in its basement-level shipping department at 225 Fifth Avenue. The 225 Fifth Avenue building, occupying Fifth Avenue between 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Streets, had become the center in New York for the gift trade in the 1920s and would remain so throughout Ernest Sohn's career. Weil-Freeman specialized in pottery and glass gift items imported from Europe, primarily Germany, Hungary, Austria and

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<sup>11</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Histories of the Gift Shows and Exhibit Buildings," 53, no. 5 (May 1957): 189.

<sup>12</sup> This section is based on *Gift and Art Buyer*, ed., "Our Market Places: Gift Shows and Permanent Displays," 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 61-63, 126, 130 and *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Histories of the Gift Shows and Exhibit Buildings," 53, no. 5 (May 1957): 69, 182-191.

<sup>13</sup> The shows in Chicago and New York were coordinated so that representatives and firms could attend both—usually they were held at least one week apart.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted information contained in this section was section was recorded in interviews with Ernest Sohn conducted by the author on October 18 and November 21, 2005.

Czechoslovakia. An August 1936 Weil-Freeman advertisement heralded “An important and newly designed assemblage of Glass, Pottery and China which includes Contemporary and Traditional Decorative Accessories, Distinctive Table Arrangements and Decorations, Buffet and Drinking Requisites, Smokers Accessories.”<sup>15</sup> Ernest Sohn initially worked packing and unpacking large trucks and sorting Weil-Freeman merchandise for \$12 a week. This job gave Sohn much contact with giftware items selected for the American market and provided him with inspiration. Sohn decided that he would try his hand at designing similar items. He initially made designs for a smoking set (cigarette lighter, cigarette box and ashtray) to be made in porcelain.<sup>16</sup> Weil-Freeman purchased these designs for \$25, double his weekly wage, and Sohn quit his job in the shipping department to become a freelance designer.

Ernest Sohn continued to focus on his self-education as a designer and his own giftware designs in the next few years. Sohn’s next success was selling several hundred designs to the importing house Ebeling and Reuss.<sup>17</sup> Ebeling and Reuss, based in Philadelphia, also specialized in giftware imports from northern Europe.<sup>18</sup> Ebeling and Reuss had a history of employing contract designers to create designs for items that would be manufactured in Europe and imported for the American market. It is through Ebeling and Reuss that Ernest Sohn received his first public credit as a designer. An October 1938 Ebeling and Reuss advertisement, figure 1.1, trumpeted “New Creations by

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<sup>15</sup> Weil-Freeman Inc., Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 32, no. 8 (August 1936): 60.

<sup>16</sup> The author has not discovered any images of this set in Weil-Freeman advertisements or features in trade journals during this period.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Sohn recalled “about 500 designs” in an interview conducted by the author November 21, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> For a brief, yet informative history of the company see Venable, ed., *China and Glass in America*, 289-290.

Ernest Sohn!”<sup>19</sup> Although the young designer was virtually unknown to anyone in America, including the trade, the advertisement noted that the illustrated vases and smoking accessories “strikingly demonstrated” the “acknowledged skill of this artist in graceful curve, style and beauty of form.” Ernest Sohn’s time in the spotlight was to be short-lived—Ebeling and Reuss never again acknowledged him in an advertisement and it is unclear what other items might have been manufactured for the company to Sohn’s designs.

During the late 1930s Ernest Sohn spent many hours at the New York Public Library to expose himself to the industry and to form and design possibilities. There he studied trade and popular periodicals as well as tear sheets, illustrations of items taken from newspapers, catalogs and other periodicals. Sohn recalled that “what counts in the end is that I regularly followed up things in the public library. I looked at the glassware, I looked at ceramics, later on I looked at metalware, and worked with the metal.”<sup>20</sup> This visual education exposed him to general trends in design and possible shapes and styles for his own designs. The other key part of Sohn’s education came from his work on the job in the production of actual designs.

In late 1937 or early 1938 Ernest Sohn went to work for Warren Kessler. Sohn’s father did not trust the freedom and uncertainty of the freelancer’s life and strongly encouraged his son to find permanent work. Sohn became both a designer and production manager for Kessler. Warren Kessler was a manufacturer’s representative and also a manufacturer himself, creating a variety of items for the gift market. Nearly

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<sup>19</sup> Ebeling and Reuss, Inc., Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 34, no. 10 (October 1938): 61.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn by the author November 21, 2005.

seventy years later Sohn recalled the strong personality of his former boss from whom he learned much. It was with Kessler that Sohn gained his first experience in design informed by working with the materials and fabricators in the factory. Sohn vividly recalled travelling with Kessler to a Czech glass factory in 1938 where he was to spend nearly a month learning and conferring with the glass artisans about the workability of his designs. Sohn remembered “But since I was working with the glass blowers and glass gatherers and batch makers and the furnace and so forth I could design things that could be made, not just on paper.”<sup>21</sup> This working in the factory with the manufacturer and learning the possibilities of materials first hand was to influence Sohn’s design work throughout his career. Knowing the material was important.

During Ernest Sohn’s time with Warren Kessler he also made connections with industry people. One of the most important was Mary Ryan, figure 1.2.<sup>22</sup> Ryan was a pioneer leader in the gift industry. She had come from a gift retailing background before joining the fledgling trade journal *Gift and Art Shop* in late 1917. After leaving the publication in 1920 she entered the wholesale business and then founded her own company in 1925. The firm grew and prospered under Ryan’s deft guidance and became “at its height, undisputed leader among wholesale gift organizations.”<sup>23</sup> Her showrooms, figure 1.3, dominating the second floor of 225 Fifth Avenue in New York, were “grand,

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn conducted by the author November 21, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> The information on Ryan in this section is based on Mary Ryan, “Looking Back Over Twenty Years,” *Gift and Art Buyer* 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 35-36, 126; *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “A Great Industry and How It Grew,” 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 104, 106; and *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “Mary Ryan, Gift Pioneer, Dies,” 74, no. 8 (August 1973): 124.

<sup>23</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “A Great Industry and How It Grew,” 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 104.

museum-like, a mecca for virtually every important buyer from the Thirties through the Fifties.”<sup>24</sup>

Mary Ryan was the representative for many stylish and innovative lines and was recognized as an innovator and leader in the field for her progressive practices. Kessler products were among those select manufacturers featured by name in lavish full-page advertisements that Mary Ryan ran in the trade journals during this time.<sup>25</sup> A 1937 *Gift and Art Buyer* feature on her organization summarized Ryan’s innovations: “Miss Ryan has concentrated on the creation of original merchandise, on keying her lines to advance trends, on re-styling the manufacturers’ lines to meet the demands of a discriminating clientele, on keeping in close touch with designers, merchandisers, and all concerned with the field of interior design and decoration.”<sup>26</sup> A later trade journal history of the gift industry pointed to her leadership and more pointedly to her introduction of the concept of product development: “concepts many another firm follows today, of not simply ‘representing’ manufacturers, but of actually working with them in the creation, styling and coordination of new lines.”<sup>27</sup> In her obituary *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* noted “many of the prominent people in the field gained experience in her firm,” and among these was Ernest Sohn.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 104, 106

<sup>25</sup> For advertisements see Mary Ryan, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 32, no. 8 (August 1936): 73; Mary Ryan, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 35, no. 3 (March 1939): 31; Mary Ryan, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 36, no. 2 (February 1940): 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Business Biographies: Mary Ryan,” 33, no. 4 (April 1937): 110.

<sup>27</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “A Great Industry and How It Grew,” 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 106.

<sup>28</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, “Mary Ryan, Gift Pioneer, Dies,” 74, no. 8 (August 1973): 124.

Sohn recalled Mary Ryan with affection decades after they first met: “she was the best known and most successful of the gift houses, and she was very friendly to me...she encouraged me...”<sup>29</sup> Ryan reinforced Sohn’s belief that design must be grounded in the realities of materials and production. She brought Sohn to her showrooms and introduced him to important designers and artists in the field and later showed him the drawings that they had presented to her. She emphasized that although the gift industry was based on aesthetics and beauty, the practical side must also be emphasized. As Sohn later recalled: “she said ‘now look at this—that’s a nice drawing but can it be made?’ And this was a very important thing.”

World War II was to affect all aspects of American life and the gift industry was certainly not untouched.<sup>30</sup> Hostilities in Europe soon cut off imports from most countries and wartime restrictions virtually eliminated imports from those countries with which the United States was still trading. This was a significant change for an industry reliant on imported gifts and novelties. Although war restrictions on metals and certain other materials eliminated the availability of whole categories of gift items there was still a demand to be filled. Imports from Central and South America became more prominent. American manufacturers also benefited directly from the cut-off of European sources. American manufacturers were able to take the lead in the production of gift items for the American market and remained strong forces in the post-war period when Europe was still recovering. In the same way American design and style also gained a boost.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn conducted by the author November 21, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Information in this section is based on the author’s careful perusal of the trade periodical *Gift and Art Buyer* from the years 1938 through 1947.

Through 1941 Ernest Sohn continued to work with Warren Kessler. Sohn even designed and helped to build a glass factory on Long Island for Kessler in order to produce glass items that were then unavailable from Europe. With the entry of the United States into the war in late 1941 Ernest Sohn left the gift industry and moved from New York to Texas. Although exempted from military service because of the birth of his daughter in 1942, Sohn was required to work in a more necessary position. He joined one of his brothers to help run a flourmill. Sohn was responsible for the shipping department of this large company that supplied the United States military among other clients. Ernest Sohn and his family remained in Texas throughout the war.

In 1945 Sohn returned to New York and rejoined the gift industry as designer and production manager for the gift house Rubel and Company. Announcing his appointment *Crockery and Glass Journal* accurately wrote that Sohn “has worked with glass factories here and on the Continent...”<sup>31</sup> The account in *Gift and Art Buyer* was a bit more flowery, stretching the truth somewhat: “Formerly employed by leading glass, lamp and metal manufacturers, he received his training in various European schools and colleges.”<sup>32</sup> The article also noted that several of Sohn’s new designs would soon be on display.

Rubel and Company was a relatively young gift house under the direction of Edmund Rubel, figure 1.4. Ernest Sohn and Rubel became friends when they both worked at Weil-Freeman in 1936 and 1937.<sup>33</sup> Rubel had worked in the gift industry as a

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<sup>31</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, “Names in the News,” 137, no. 6 (December 1945): 64.

<sup>32</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “News from 225,” 41, no. 12 (November 1945): 154.

<sup>33</sup> Interview by the author with Ernest Sohn, March 16, 2006. Encouraging this connection was the fact that Rubel came from the same part of Germany as did Sohn and his family. To his friends and acquaintances in the trade he was known as Eddie Rubel.

salesman and was to continue to focus on sales throughout his career.<sup>34</sup> Rubel left Weil-Freeman in late 1938 or early 1939 to join the young gift house of Ashford-Fenton.<sup>35</sup> Rubel became vice-president of the company and within a year the company had changed its name to Rubel and Fenton to reflect his leading role with the other principal Harvey Fenton.<sup>36</sup> The *Gift and Art Buyer* noted that the newly renamed company represented a variety of lines made by several different domestic manufacturers: “Blenko glass, Bellette wood, Cooper lamps and pictures, Tebor Crownford American-made china, Queens art pewter, Corham artificial flowers, Soria wrought iron, Mar-No-Lawn tables and Malcolm’s Creations.”<sup>37</sup> The firm continued to represent a wide variety of gift and art items produced in glass, ceramics, wood, metal, and plastic throughout the 1940s. The house also tended to focus on American-made items and used the appropriately patriotic slogan “Masterpieces of American Craftsmanship” in the early-1940s.<sup>38</sup> Harvey Fenton left the company in November 1942, joining the army for officer training.<sup>39</sup> A little more than a year later the firm underwent its final name change to Rubel and Company with

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<sup>34</sup> Weil-Freeman advertisements noted him as a salesman attending various gift shows as a representative, see Weil-Freeman Inc., Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 33, no. 9 (September 1937): 75.

<sup>35</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “What’s What at ‘225’ Fifth Avenue,” 35, no. 2 (February 1939): 121.

<sup>36</sup> See Rubel and Fenton, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 36, no. 1 (January 1940): 5 and *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Going on in the Trade,” 36, no. 1 (January 1940): 34.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Rubel and Fenton, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 36, no. 8 (August 1940): 46-47 and Rubel and Fenton, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 38, no. 2 (February 1942): 55.

<sup>39</sup> See *Gift and Art Buyer*, “News from Two-Twenty-Five,” 38, no. 12 (December 1942): 55.

assurances to the trade that “the firm will function exactly as before as far as location, lines represented and sales personnel are concerned.”<sup>40</sup>

Sohn’s appointment as staff designer for Rubel and Company was characteristic of a movement within the gift industry and America generally. Design had become important and noteworthy, something to be focused on, thought about, honored and marketed. American designers came to the fore. They were well known and the products they designed were identified with the designer, identified with their skill, innovations, ingenuity and taste. While this trend in large items such as automobiles and furniture was increasingly common from the late 1920s with the rise of the American industrial designer, it was uncommon in the tableware and gift fields until the mid to late 1930s. A pioneer “name” designer in the gift and tableware field was Russel Wright who, in the early 1930s began to gain recognition and national distribution with Mary Ryan of his spun aluminum serving accessories.<sup>41</sup> Wright’s pioneering use of his name and reputation to identify and sell well-designed items for everyday use in the home was increasingly commonplace in the post-war years. Many gift houses named designers to their staffs in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Sohn was among the first of the major gift house designers to be named and recognized in the post-war period.

Design increasingly became a focus for the popular press where innovative styling and designer names were often noted in editorial features. Museums and educational institutions also increasingly began to focus on design, honoring designed

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<sup>40</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Going on in the Trade,” 39, no. 12 (December 1943): 40. See also Rubel and Co., Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 39, no. 12 (December 1943): 39.

<sup>41</sup> See Donald Albrecht, Robert Schonfeld, and Lindsay Stamm Shapiro, *Russel Wright: Creating American Lifestyle*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001):141-144. This book provides an excellent overview Wright’s life and work.

household goods and designers in exhibitions and publications. This confluence of academic, museum, and press focus on design contributed to what can be identified as a “Good Design” movement during the post-war period.<sup>42</sup> The focus on design by these tastemaking entities also further encouraged the gift industry to pay attention to and feature design in their manufacturing and marketing.

In joining Rubel, Ernest Sohn had the opportunity to further expand his experience working with and designing for a variety of materials. His role as designer and production manager assured that he would be exposed to materials and their possibilities by working directly with various factories and manufacturers. Rubel and Company represented many manufacturers working in glass, ceramics, metalware, wood, and plastics. A December 1945 company advertisement listed twenty-six different manufacturers that were represented by Rubel.<sup>43</sup> Among them were a few that might still be recognized today for their innovative and well designed products such as Glidden Pottery and Blenko Glass. However, most were small manufacturers producing a variety of gift items that covered a range from elegant artware to cheap novelties.

Sohn’s identifiable early work for Rubel consisted largely of metalware items, especially spun aluminum. October 1945 advertisements in *Gift and Art Buyer* and *Giftwares* featured “New Stars to Shine For You”—an assortment of spun aluminum cocktail shakers and drinking accessories with “Hand-Hammered Cast Aluminum”.

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<sup>42</sup> For a good introduction to this movement and the role of one of the major players within it, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, see Terrence Riley and Edward Eigen, “Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good Design” in John Elderfield, ed, *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century, At Home and Abroad*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994.) See Appendix A for a further discussion of Good Design.

<sup>43</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 41, no. 12 (December 1945): 11.

handles and trim, figure 1.5.<sup>44</sup> These items utilized easy-to-manufacture shapes with elegant detailing in the cast trim and end pieces giving the impression of hand hammering and transforming the cylinders into functional objects. By the following season Sohn had reworked these basic shapes with the addition of curves and color. A January 1946 Rubel advertisement proclaimed drinkware as “Smooth As Satin” and featured a similar assortment of alcohol related accessories, figure 1.6.<sup>45</sup> Sohn had transformed the straight cylinders into gently curving forms that now were embellished by “bright colored plastic bands” at their bases.<sup>46</sup> Some also featured the addition of practical, although perhaps less than elegant, handles. This line of spun aluminum, identified as *Loumas* (later spelled *Leumas*) *Ware* in a June 1946 advertisement, was a mainstay of Rubel offerings after Sohn’s appointment as designer.<sup>47</sup> Sohn continued to design somewhat different *Leumas* collections for Rubel throughout his time there. In 1947 the aluminum ware was given a highly polished surface and proclaimed “Silverbrite,” figure 1.7.<sup>48</sup> Again Sohn used similar shapes which, in addition to being highly polished, featured a hammered look on their surfaces and beaded foot bands.

The Rubel aluminum lines were also copied, a common practice in the gift industry and a strong indication of a line’s success. In June 1946 Lipper and Mann, a newly formed gift house founded by former Rubel salesmen, introduced “Spunray by

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<sup>44</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 2, no. 3 (October 1945): 33 and Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 41, no. 10 (October 1945): 11.

<sup>45</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 42, no. 1 (January 1946): 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 42, no. 6 (June 1946): 84. Aluminum ware was manufactured for Rubel under the *Leumas* name through the 1960s.

<sup>48</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 43, no. 3 (March 1947): 35.

‘Cellini Studios,’” figure 1.8.<sup>49</sup> This spun aluminum line featured silhouettes very reminiscent of Sohn’s with the addition of “contrasting bow-knot handles of rich copper.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition to his work with metals at Rubel, Ernest Sohn was also exposed to the potentials of ceramics, primarily through his experiences with Glidden Pottery. Sohn credited his work at Glidden under the guidance of Glidden Parker with his real education in the characteristics of ceramics and possibilities for their design.<sup>51</sup> Glidden Parker founded Glidden Pottery in 1940 in Alfred, New York, adjacent to the New York College of Ceramics at Alfred University.<sup>52</sup> From that time Rubel was Glidden’s exclusive representative.<sup>53</sup> Glidden became known for clean, simple, modern shapes and stylized patterns on a dense stoneware body. Glidden produced a variety of items both decorative and utilitarian, including dinnerware. Ernest Sohn worked with Glidden to develop a few patterns to be applied to dinnerware shapes designed by Glidden Parker.<sup>54</sup> One was a set of circus-inspired figures including clowns and trapeze artists, figure 1.9, that recalled similar decorations Sohn had created for his young daughter’s bedroom. Another was *Plume* a stylized feather decoration that was introduced by Rubel in June 1946, figure

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<sup>49</sup> Lipper and Mann, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 42, no. 6 (June 1946): 170. The formal opening of the Lipper Mann showroom was noted the following month, see *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Going on in the Trade,” 42, no. 7 (July 1947): 286.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with Ernest Sohn by the author on October 18, 2005 and March 16, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> For an extensive account of Glidden see Margaret Carney, *Glidden Pottery*; (Alfred, NY: Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, 2001.)

<sup>53</sup> See Rubel and Fenton, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 36, no. 8 (August 1940): 46-47.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn by the author on November 21, 2005.

1.10.<sup>55</sup> Glidden Parker was frequently recognized by the “Good Design” movement. One example of this was the Museum of Modern Art, New York citing Glidden in 1947 for the modern simplicity and utility of his casserole designs.<sup>56</sup> In the same year Parker was also honored for his casserole designs in the twelfth National Ceramic Exhibition at the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>57</sup> Parker won a prize sponsored by Richard Gump, head of the influential Gump department store in San Francisco, for “the best designed piece or pieces suitable for mass production.”<sup>58</sup> In this case the casseroles exhibited were decorated with Sohn’s *Plume* design, figure 1.11. While working with Glidden, Sohn’s activities were not just limited to pattern design, he also assisted the company in refining its manufacturing processes and machinery for greater efficiency.

While working with Glidden exposed Ernest Sohn to some of the most innovative and best-designed products on the market, his own design work was not always cutting edge and often was dictated by commercial requirements of the business. Sohn above all was a practical and versatile designer and was able to create items in a variety of styles be they innovative and modern or conventional and historically based. Examples of Sohn’s more historically inspired designs were featured in trade advertisements in August 1948. The *Ambassador*, figure 1.12, was a combination tabletop lighter and cigarette holder in silver plate with clear references to historical silver forms in its beaded foot decoration

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<sup>55</sup> See *Crockery and Glass Journal*, “Right Out of the Kiln” 138, no. 6 (June 1946): 47.

<sup>56</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 44, no. 1 (January 1948): 17.

<sup>57</sup> See *Gift and Art Buyer*, “New Talent Scores at National Ceramic Exhibition,” 44, no. 1 (January 1948): 88.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

and carefully balanced profile.<sup>59</sup> Even more obvious in its historical connection was the *Leumas Early American* collection, also featured by Rubel, that month, figure 1.13.<sup>60</sup> Here Sohn used turned wood handles and somewhat conventional shapes to create serving items that would most likely appeal to the majority of Americans who were interested in historically inspired design. These two examples still had a certain elegance and charm that was not always present in Sohn's most commercial and conventional designs. A good example of this is Sohn's design for *Planter Plates* introduced in 1949 under Rubel's *Indoor Gardener* brand.<sup>61</sup> These proved to be so popular that Rubel doubled the variety of offerings just a few months later, figure 1.14.<sup>62</sup> *Planter Plates* featured nineteenth century prints like those of Currier and Ives surrounded by a circle of copper or brass mounted in front of a container designed to hold a plant which would grow over and around the plate while the whole ensemble hung on a wall. Variations on this theme were created that included candleholders and even a lamp, figure 1.15.<sup>63</sup> In reflecting on these designs in later years Ernest Sohn recalled that they were quite popular. He also was quick to dismiss them as "kitsch" and shrug them off as something that was done for commercial reasons.<sup>64</sup>

Ernest Sohn's time at Rubel marks the emergence of his specialization in the design of certain types of items that were also tied to trends in American homelife.

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<sup>59</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 44, no. 8 (August 1948): 7.

<sup>60</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 44, no. 8 (August 1948): 41.

<sup>61</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 45, no. 7 (July 1949): 7.

<sup>62</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 46, no. 2 (February 1950): 32-33.

<sup>63</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 46, no. 7 (July 1950): 7.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn by the author on March 16, 2006.

These, as well as certain Sohn design motifs, would be repeated again and again in his work over the next few decades. The design of drinkware and items for serving alcohol and other beverages continued to be an important part of Sohn's design work for the company. The strong demand for well-designed items to serve and hold drinks was indicative of an emerging cocktail culture in the post-war period. A 1951 editorial by Walter Browder in *Crockery and Glass Journal* pointed to this trend with some astounding statistics.<sup>65</sup> Prior to the end of World War II "65% of the liquor consumed in the United States was consumed outside the home, in bars and restaurants mostly; only 35% of our liquor was drunk at home."<sup>66</sup> By 1951 the statistics had see-sawed: "Today, almost the reverse is true; about 70% of the country's liquor is drunk at home; and only 30% is bought and drunk on the outside."<sup>67</sup> The source of this information was the trade group Licensed Beverage Industries which also indicated the "trend towards more home-drinking has developed mainly during the past couple of years."<sup>68</sup>

Browder's editorial revealed that the trend for serving alcohol in the home was part of "America's growing, ever growing predilection for entertaining at home *more casually*."<sup>69</sup> Objects for casual home entertaining were a rapidly growing market and one that the gift and tableware industries were uniquely positioned to take advantage of.<sup>70</sup>

This became a specialty and focus in the work of Ernest Sohn from his time at Rubel

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<sup>65</sup> Information in this section is taken from Walter Browder, "Liquor, Bar Accessories and Home, Sweet Home," *Crockery and Glass Journal* 148, no. 3 (March 5, 1951): 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Italics are original to text.

through the end of his career. One of his first useful, yet decorative and designed, serving items was “The ‘Original’ Ham and Egg Oven To Table Server” advertised by Rubel in January 1948, figure 1.16.<sup>71</sup> The simple spun aluminum pan was embellished by a shaped and hammered bronze handle. This relatively simple design is perhaps most telling in its name—“Oven To Table Server.” The idea that something could serve both as a cooking device and a serving dish was a constantly seen theme in serving items for the home in the post-war period. An item that could both cook and serve eliminated extra dishes and work for its owner. Two years later Ernest Sohn had enhanced this frying pan form with an alcohol burner and stand, figure 1.17, making it appropriate “for glamorous cooking during company entertaining” according to *Crockery and Glass Journal*.<sup>72</sup> The *Buffet Burner* as it was dubbed was part of “*French Provincial Tableware by Leumas*” which was “To delight the taste of the epicure” according to the Rubel advertisement.<sup>73</sup> In addition to the *Burner* which allowed for at-the-table cooking, the pictured casseroles combined utilitarian brown pottery appropriate for use in the cooking process. This utilitarian ware was enhanced and made more glamorous by “gleaming copper” serving trays and lids featuring jaunty handles.<sup>74</sup> The combination of different materials in one serving or entertaining accessory, here copper with ceramic, became a key Sohn motif that he continued to utilize throughout his career.

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<sup>70</sup> The author will discuss the movement for casual home entertaining extensively in the second chapter.

<sup>71</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 44, no. 1 (January 1948): 11.

<sup>72</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, “Right Out of the Kiln,” 146, no. 2 (February 1950): 66. For the advertisement shown in figure 17 see Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 45, no. 2 (February 1949): 13

<sup>73</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 45, no. 2 (February 1949): 13

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Other items that were to become Sohn specialties were also seen for the first time in his Rubel productions. One was the large coffee urn or beverage server on warming stand. The trade magazine *Giftwares* in February 1950 featured one such server that stood fifteen inches high, held 20 cups and combined copper in the body with copper and brass in the stand and legs, figure 1.18.<sup>75</sup> Accompanying the urn in the illustration are ceramic coffee cups with copper saucers, again revealing Sohn's penchant for combining materials for a sense of the unusual and to add visual interest.

Another new specialty of Ernest Sohn were chafing dishes which Rubel first featured in an August 1950 advertisement, figure 1.19.<sup>76</sup> These cooking and serving items were proclaimed "For the Home Chef—A Gourmet's Delight."<sup>77</sup> The use of chafing dishes for cooking and serving at the table or buffet experienced a renaissance in the late 1940s and through the 1950s, a renaissance that was strongly tied to an upsurge in home entertaining during the period. Sohn's chafing dishes for Rubel were fairly conservative in their styling with curvaceous cabriole legs and added detailing in the collar that held the chafing dish and water pan aloft on these legs. An example in a private collection of this or a very similar design also evidences Sohn's penchant for combining materials in one serving item, figure 1.20. While the majority of the piece is copper, the cooking pan appears to be aluminum and the legs and fitting attaching the handle to the body are brass or bronze. Finally the finial and the handle are made of wood, a practical and easily shaped insulating material.

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<sup>75</sup> *Giftwares*, "New York Show Trends," 6, no. 7 (February 1950): 23.

<sup>76</sup> See Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 46, no. 8 (August 1950): 9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

The idea that a chafing dish such as Sohn's was a perfect item to use in informal, casual entertaining was evident in its inclusion in a 1951 window display at McCreery's department store in New York. This window display was illustrated in a *Giftwares* article about how retailers might take advantage of the "seasonal demand for outdoor living accessories," especially those related to barbecuing.<sup>78</sup> The McCreery window featured an "Outdoor buffet setting" with a window placard reading "Jim and I called up everyone we knew when we saw how rare the day—and had a barbecue. What fun to see him do the cooking and burn the buns..."<sup>79</sup> This sort of informal and casual entertaining was facilitated by such utensils as the Rubel chafing dish.

One of the last and most successful forms Sohn designed for Rubel and one that would become a Sohn specialty was a lazy susan introduced at the summer gift shows in 1950. An August 1950 advertisement featured the new *Laizy Daizy*, figure 1.21, with the headline "It's New! It's Unique! It's Smart!"<sup>80</sup> This new serving accessory was intended to captivate and be shown off by those entertaining in the home: "Every hostess will immediately be enchanted with this new, smart, gay conversation piece."<sup>81</sup> Ernest Sohn's unique design was in the form of large simplified flower. Eight removable, petal-shaped ceramic dishes fit into a two part round ceramic base.<sup>82</sup> Between the bottom and top halves of this base were ball bearings, which allowed the top half with the dishes in place

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<sup>78</sup> See *Giftwares*, "How to Climb Aboard the Barbecue Bandwagon For Volume Summer Sales," 7, no. 10 (May 1951): 10-12.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 46, no. 8 (August 1950): 7. While this advertisement uses the spelling *Laizy Daisy* the author has found that the trade name was correctly spelled *Laizy Daizy*.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

to easily twirl. A brass handle was mounted in the center allowing the whole unit to be lifted and brought to the table or any other place. A Rubel brochure for the *Laizy Daizy*, figure 1.22, highlighted its versatility for a variety of home entertaining uses.<sup>83</sup> The text of the brochure highlighted the fact that the dishes were ovenproof, could be removed and were equally useful individually and as a set: “Complete, it can be used as an hors d’oeuvres dish; singly, the pieces make attractive ashtrays, dessert dishes, etc.”<sup>84</sup>

The *Laizy Daizy* was evidently quite a sensation and a success for Sohn and Rubel. In November 1950 it was singled out by *Crockery and Glass Journal* as an item worthy of promotion in an instructional article on selling with signcards.<sup>85</sup> Its unique construction and versatility made it the ideal candidate for promotion. The example signcard headline pointed to the *Laizy Daizy’s* potential as the perfect gift: “For the Thoughtful Hostess the Best In Lazy Susans.”<sup>86</sup> Its usefulness and potential to lessen work and make entertaining easier was a key part of the sales promotion. The example signcard emphasized this with text reading “Eight ovenproof serving pieces—keep food hot longer, not so many dishes to wash, stove-to-table serving” and also “Removable sections—use as individual casseroles, easier to store and wash.” Real promotions soon followed this fictional one as the *Laizy Daizy* was sold across the country.<sup>87</sup> The *New*

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<sup>82</sup> The ceramic parts were produced by Glidden Pottery.

<sup>83</sup> The brochure is in a private collection and accompanied a *Laizy Daizy* still residing in its original shipping box.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Marian Anderson, “How to Make Salesclerks of Signcards,” *Crockery and Glass Journal* 147, no. 5 (November 1950): 26-27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> One *Laizy Daizy* the author has examined in a private collection was retailed by the Bon Marché department store in Seattle, Washington according to the shipping label on the original box. Another

*York Times* noted in late November 1950 that the *Laizy Daizy* was available at the leading retailer, B. Altman's and was an ideal gift.<sup>88</sup> The article emphasized how a lazy susan such as this "is anything but lazy...a useful piece of equipment for the homemaker during the holidays" and "To Expedite Serving Throughout the Year."<sup>89</sup> Rubel itself proclaimed the *Laizy Daizy* a "Dazzling Success" that would be hard to top.<sup>90</sup> However, this did not prevent the company from marketing a *Crystal Daizy*, a similar serving item made primarily of glass. A few months later Ernest Sohn and Rubel promoted *The Ferris Wheel*, figure 1.23, which was not far removed from the *Laizy Daizy* in its novelty form and use of individual dishes that might be removed for serving, cooking and cleaning.<sup>91</sup> Both the *Laizy Daizy* and the *Ferris Wheel* show Ernest Sohn's Rubel work at its most interesting, combining usefulness and functionality with charm, wit and novelty. All of which would be most welcomed in mid-century home entertainment.

Ernest Sohn's time at Rubel was fruitful for both Sohn as a designer and Rubel as a business. Sohn had the opportunity to grow in learning and experience with a company representing so many varied lines and materials. His time at Rubel increased his skills as a gifted designer who created design after design that was well styled, functional and, above all, marketable. Rubel in this time became one of the leading gift houses in the field. Ernest Sohn had a great part in this success.

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advertisement shows the model was sold in Los Angeles as well, see Robinson's, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1951: 25.

<sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, "Lazy Susans Appear for Holiday Tables To Expedite Serving Throughout the Year," November 27, 1950: 27.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 47, no. 1 (January 1951): 7.

<sup>91</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 47, no. 2 (February 1951): 9.

However, by June 1951 Ernest Sohn had left Rubel to embark in his own business.<sup>92</sup> No incident or problem prompted this departure but a few reasons can be conjectured.<sup>93</sup> Of course there was the potential for greater financial gain if his new business was successful. Sohn would also win much greater freedom in his design work and he would determine the direction of his own company. This freedom included the freedom *not* to design some of the more kitsch items Sohn produced at Rubel. Increased recognition and perhaps even fame could be found in this new business: no longer was the name Rubel on the packaging and the product, it was Sohn.

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<sup>92</sup> Announcements were made in all the trade journals, see for example *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 6 (June 1951): 110, 112.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Ernest Sohn by the author on March 16, 2006. In this interview Sohn indicated he had no negative feelings toward Rubel and still considered Edmund Rubel a friend after his departure.

## Chapter 2

Ernest Sohn's establishment of his own firm and the opening of his showroom at 225 Fifth Avenue were significant news in the trade. All of the major trade publications made note of Sohn's endeavor in their June 1951 issues.<sup>1</sup> The trade accounts cited Sohn as a well-known figure in the industry who was responsible for designing many successful lines. The *Gift and Art Buyer* featured a photograph of the bespeckled designer smoking a pipe, figure 2.1, and said Sohn "As designer and production head for the last fifteen years with firms in '225,' he has created numerous items such as planter plates, Laizy Daizy, chafing dishes and other informal buffet services."<sup>2</sup> *Giftwares* magazine cited his previous employment, "Mr. Sohn will be remembered from the showroom of Rubel and Company where he was the general manager," and the fact that he "has been designing popular items for the past fifteen years."<sup>3</sup> All of the accounts noted Sohn's versatility as a designer and that the new firm would offer ceramic, glass, metal and plastic items. *Giftwares* cited Sohn's "new merchandising slogan—'Useful and Decorative.'" This slogan was to be used by Sohn for much of his career. The June 1951 trade publications also noted that Fred Press, a sculptor and designer, would replace Sohn at Rubel and would work in a wide variety of materials as Sohn had done.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "What's Doing at 225 Fifth Avenue," 148, no. 6 (June 1951): 62; *China Glass and Decorative Accessories*, "The Gift and Art Center," 70, no. 10 (June 1951): 68; *Giftwares and Home Fashions*, "Notes from New York," 7, no. 11 (June 1951): 63; and *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 6 (June 1951): 112. The new business was also reported in the business lease section of the *New York Times*, see *New York Times*, "Two More Concerns Rent In 600 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.," June 14, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 6 (June 1951): 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Giftwares and Home Fashions*, "Notes from New York," 7, no. 11 (June 1951): 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "Industry News: Close-Ups," 148, no. 6 (June 1951): 36; *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 6 (June 1951): 110. Press was to become Rubel's "name" designer and

The launch of Sohn's line and opening of his showroom were done at a strategic time in the market season. The new showroom was open and available for store buyers to browse during the important New York summer shows, a time in which a huge volume of buying was done in anticipation of fall and Christmas sales. A full-page advertisement by Ernest Sohn Associates, as the new firm was known, ran in three of the major trade journals in July 1951 and further highlighted the new venture. The advertisement in *Crockery and Glass Journal* featured an invitation to buyers, "You are cordially invited to see our useful and decorative home accessories," superimposed over a newspaper column with the heading "Going On in New York."<sup>5</sup> This issue of the magazine also previewed the National China, Glass and Pottery Show which was to take place July 15 to 20 at the Hotel New Yorker, the first of the major shows occurring after the opening of the Sohn showroom.<sup>6</sup> The "show trends" previewed by the magazine featured "the informal trend," leading to "more bar and serving accessories sold today than ever before," just the sort of items Ernest Sohn Associates had to offer.<sup>7</sup> A different advertisement ran in the July issues of both *Giftwares* and *Gift and Art Buyer*, figure 2.2. It trumpeted "The Finest Chafing Dish ever created" and invited buyers "to see our complete line of new creations in stainless steel and other media for informal entertainment."<sup>8</sup> With these advertisements Sohn further publicized his new venture and

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was cited in their ads from that time forward and also often had his name as part of the mark on Rubel products.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Crockery and Glass Journal* 149, no. 1 (July 1951): 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "New York is Hot in July," 149, no. 1 (July 1951): 91-97.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares and Home Fashions* 7, no. 12 (July 1951): 59 and Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 47, no. 7 (July 1951): 15.

his new lines to gift buyers who would be flocking to New York for the New York Gift Show from August 20 through 24.

Ernest Sohn Associates' entry into the market seemed quite successful and reports of the opening of the showroom in the trade press were quite glowing. *China, Glass and Decorative Accessories* wrote of the "buffet luncheon and cocktail party marking the event," noting that "Many leading buyers from the New York City area attended and inspected attractive displays of useful decorative home accessories in ceramics, glass, wood and metals, all designed by Mr. Sohn."<sup>9</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal* ran a photo of the "all-day open house" introducing the new showroom. The photo featured several prominent buyers as well as Sohn and his wife and associates, figure 2.3.<sup>10</sup> Amongst the prominent buyers pictured was Joe Giarrocco, buyer for the B. Altman department store of New York. Giarrocco was one of the most powerful and influential buyers in the country during this period.<sup>11</sup> B. Altman's promotion of Ernest Sohn designs was key in his firm's early success. In fact Ernest Sohn later recalled that it was B. Altman's early backing of his designs and, in particular, a full-page advertisement run in one of the most chic New York publications, *The New Yorker*, that helped to ensure his success.<sup>12</sup> The advertisement, figure 2.4, appeared in the December 8, 1951 issue of the magazine and featured a grouping of five gifts for men which would "highlight their entertaining" in the

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<sup>9</sup> *China Glass and Decorative Accessories*, "The Gift and Art Center," 70, no. 11 (July 1951): 40. It seems particularly appropriate that the showroom opened with a buffet lunch and cocktail party.

<sup>10</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, Illustration, 149, no. 2 (August 1951): 69.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Giarrocco and his powerful position as Altman's buyer see Charles L. Venable, ed., *China and Glass in America, 1880-1980*, 296.

<sup>12</sup> Interview by the author with Ernest Sohn on November 21, 2005.

future.<sup>13</sup> Amongst these masculine gifts for drinking, smoking and eating, Sohn's signature chafing dish of stainless steel and ebonized wood was prominently displayed. Altman's feature of this chafing dish is made more noticeable by the fact that their weekly advertisements in the *New Yorker* were usually devoted to fashion items and women's wear.<sup>14</sup>

December also marked an important turning point for Sohn's young company. It was during this month that a new partnership was announced between Ernest Sohn and a leading sales representative named Jack Orenstein, figure 2.5.<sup>15</sup> Orenstein, several years older than Sohn, began his career in the industry in 1919.<sup>16</sup> By 1922 he and partners founded a firm based at 225 Fifth Avenue for importing and selling Chinese and Japanese art items. In 1934 he and a partner founded Everlast Metal Products which became an early leader in the manufacture and use of aluminum in decorative and serving items.<sup>17</sup> Everlast was certainly a success, it produced and sold a huge volume of material and had a leading role in defense manufacturing during World War II.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> B. Altman and Co., Advertisement, *New Yorker*, December 8, 1951, 30.

<sup>14</sup> In the six months before and after this advertisement ran B. Altman ran only two other advertisements other similar advertisements in the *New Yorker*, one for English crystal, the other for a new modern dinnerware set.

<sup>15</sup> Accounts appeared in all the trade journals: *China Glass and Decorative Accessories*, "The Gift and Art Center," 71, no. 4 (December 1951): 90; *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "Industry News: Forms New Company," 149, no. 6 (December 1951): 125; *Giftwares*, "People and News," 8, no. 5 (December 1951): 62; and *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 12 (December 1951): 106. These form the basis of this section unless otherwise noted.

<sup>16</sup> See *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Saluting the '40 Year' Pioneers," 53, no. 5 (May 1957): 139.

<sup>17</sup> For more on Everlast and their process of manufacturing see *Giftwares and Homewares*, "Giftwares Looks Behind the Scenes: Everlast Metal Products, Inc.," 6, no. 4 (November 1949): 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> For more on Everlast during World War II see *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Going on in the Trade," 40, no. 11 (November 1944): 108.

Jack Orenstein was a born salesman. He headed a large sales staff that covered all parts of the country including several regional showrooms. Everlast ran prominent monthly advertisements in the trade press and regularly advertised nationally in the leading women's and interiors magazines. Orenstein seems to have had a magnetic personality and often was elected to leading positions in trade organizations and charities.<sup>19</sup> In announcing the new partnership with Sohn, *Gift and Art Buyer* significantly noted "The new firm will largely retain the same sales force which has worked under Mr. Orenstein for the past years..."<sup>20</sup> Included in this sales apparatus was a second showroom in Los Angeles, which gave the young firm footing on both coasts and in the burgeoning population center of southern California.<sup>21</sup> In his new partnership Sohn became closely associated with another industry leader, Orenstein, and gained a seasoned sales organization to promote his new designs. Their many connections in the field and long experience in sales would prove invaluable in Sohn's future success.<sup>22</sup>

A new design style emerged with the founding of Ernest Sohn Associates. Ernest Sohn, freed from the confines of working under someone else's direction, was able to

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<sup>19</sup> For example, in the same month that Sohn and Orenstein announced their partnership Orenstein was elected president of the 225 Fifth Avenue Association, a trade group dedicated to promoting those companies located in this gift center, see *Giftwares*, "Shopping the Markets: New York," 8, no. 6 (January 1952): 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "News from 225," 47, no. 12 (December 1951): 106.

<sup>21</sup> The Los Angeles showroom was opened officially in July 1952 and was headed by William Orenstein, Jack Orenstein's son. See *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "What's Doing at 225 Fifth Avenue," 151, v. 1 (July 1952): 120; *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Going on in the Trade," 48, no. 7 (July 1952): 200; and *Giftwares*, "Trade Winds," 9, no. 6 (July 1952): 62.

<sup>22</sup> Indicative of this was full-page advertisement run by Orenstein and Sohn in the January 1952 issues of *Giftwares* and *Gift and Art Buyer*. It announced Jack Orenstein Associates "appointment as exclusive selling agents for Ernest Sohn Creations" and that Orenstein's sales force would be presenting Sohn's designs at an impressive 13 upcoming trade shows including the major china and glass show in Pittsburgh and the gift shows in Chicago and New York. See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 8, no. 6 (January 1952): 9 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 48, no. 1 (January 1952): 11.

experiment in a fresh manner with a variety of materials and forms. While Sohn continued to focus on similar kinds of objects, largely household accessories that would be used in cooking and serving food and drink, his design style became bolder, sleeker, more innovative and modern. Sohn's new and fresh designs ensured public acceptance and success for his fledgling firm. From his firm's founding through late 1953 Sohn's new design style was expressed in four major areas: Pyrex glass serving ware, stainless steel and copper chafing dishes and related items, *Copper and Color* ceramic serving aids, and wrought iron decorative accessories. In true Sohn fashion mixing and cross-pollination between these categories and materials was used to full advantage.

One of Ernest Sohn's earliest products and one that marked a departure from the more conservative design style he was confined to at Rubel were the Pyrex beverage and food servers Sohn introduced in 1951.<sup>23</sup> These designs combined Pyrex-brand heat-tolerant glassware with black plastic covers and handles and a final touch of plastic coil wrapping, figure 2.6. In the Pyrex collection Sohn exhibited a very sleek and contemporary aesthetic. He used a hard scientific/industrial material, Pyrex laboratory glass, and softened and humanized it slightly with the addition of simple colorful plastic accents and black plastic handles in shapes of circles and spheres.<sup>24</sup> A February 1952 advertisement in *Giftwares* featured the Pyrex collection, figure 2.7, and exhibits the

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<sup>23</sup> Among the first products marketed by the new company, they are the only ones marked "Ernest Sohn Associates," a mark that was dropped after the formation of the partnership with Jack Orenstein and the renaming of the company Ernest Sohn Creations.

<sup>24</sup> Carafes and pitchers in a private collection examined by the author have handles in ring shapes and a casserole has two side handles in a ring shape and a cover finial in the form of sphere. While the Pyrex glass, especially in the carafe forms, is close to the shapes of laboratory ware it is clear that it was made for the company in the way it is marked and the way that the forms have been adjusted to home use.

variety of items that were available.<sup>25</sup> Here the versatility and multiple uses of these items is highlighted: the carafes and lipped pitchers can serve both cold and hot drinks, martinis or coffee, while the addition of a glass filter attachment transforms the lipped pitcher into a coffeemaker as well. The ability to use the serving item in the preparation of the beverage is echoed in the “cafferoles” which provided stylish servers that the advertisement also notes are “For cooking directly over flame—not in oven.”<sup>26</sup> Sohn offered the plastic wrapping in a variety of colors, black and white for those with a more stark style and brown, red, green, and chartreuse for those looking for a bit more playfulness.

Sohn’s Pyrex collection became a critical and commercial success over the next two years. An early national feature of one of the Pyrex carafes came in the January 1952 issue of *House and Garden* magazine where a Sohn carafe was used in an illustration titled “Country flavor for a Sunday supper.”<sup>27</sup> Sohn’s carafe seemed to strike favor with the editors of *House and Garden* and it was again featured by the magazine in the next issue. Two different sizes of the carafe were displayed prominently in buffet and table settings illustrating “An American Idea in Entertaining,” figure 2.8.<sup>28</sup> The features in this important publication also pointed to the fact that Sohn’s Pyrex was being retailed in leading stores. In the first instance *House and Garden* noted the carafe was available through Hammacher Schlemmer in New York and in the second that they were available

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<sup>25</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 8, no. 7 (February 1952): 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. This sentence also points to the fact that the plastic wrapping and handles would most likely be damaged in a hot oven.

<sup>27</sup> Nika Standen, “For Sunday-Night Supper Try Cooking With Cheese,” *House and Garden*, January 1952, 46-47, 87.

<sup>28</sup> *House and Garden*, “The American Idea in Entertaining,” February 1952, 58-61, 124.

through W. and J. Sloane, New York and Saks Fifth Avenue. When another important shelter magazine, *House Beautiful*, highlighted Sohn's Pyrex carafe in July 1952 in their new and innovative products section, they noted that it was available through another leading New York retailer, Abraham and Straus.<sup>29</sup> By the Christmas season Sohn's carafe was featured in Lord and Taylor's full-page advertisement of gift items in *House and Garden*, figure 2.9.<sup>30</sup>

The trade press provides further insight into where and how Sohn's Pyrex items were sold. In a July 1952 *Giftwares* profile of Victor's, a Long Beach, California gift shop, Sohn carafes were conspicuous in an illustration of the shop's displays, figure 2.10.<sup>31</sup> This shop was located in a newly developed shopping center that was part of a burgeoning suburban area of Long Beach. *Giftwares* characterized it in this way "Modern stores service the community in a modern manner—with an easily accessible parking area for 2000 cars."<sup>32</sup> The store itself was dedicated to promoting the new American postwar lifestyle. The owners wanted to create "a modern shop where they could *specialize* in Casual Living items—where they could meet the trend with useful, fashion-right merchandise."<sup>33</sup> While the focus of the shop was to be modern in its outlook, the merchandise and store design were not necessarily so. The display units were composed of knotty pine and characterized by *Giftwares* as "authentically provincial in styling" while the other merchandise pictured in the illustrations made the

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<sup>29</sup> Julie Polshek, "It's Worth Mentioning," *House Beautiful*, July 1952, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Lord and Taylor, Advertisement, *House and Garden*, November 1952, 36.

<sup>31</sup> This section refers to *Giftwares*, "Victor's Specializes in Casual Living," 9, no. 6 (July 1952): 40-42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Italics and capitals are original to the text.

Sohn carafes stand out as the most modern in their design.<sup>34</sup> In the article *Giftwares* tellingly noted that many homes “can be overflowing with well-stocked china, glass and silver accessories but greatly lacking in the countless new developments for indoor-outdoor casual entertaining. New and old brides are equally anxious to bring their homes up to date....”<sup>35</sup> Ernest Sohn carafes were the kind of items that would allow homemakers to make these updates. Significantly the Sohn Pyrex line was located in the barbecue, patio accessories, and bar section of the store where “Giftwares for informal entertaining receives biggest promotion....”<sup>36</sup>

The trade press provided two more examples of the retailing of Sohn Pyrex in 1952. The *Gift and Art Buyer* profiled a new shop located in Manhasset, New York in August 1952.<sup>37</sup> The Gilbert and Leonard shop located in this “fast-growing, smart New York City suburb” was dedicated to giving “a metropolitan choice in accessories for the home.”<sup>38</sup> This store featured a more modern, streamlined interior created by architect Norman Cherner and featured sleek products like the Sohn carafes. A new gift shop in addition to the Maramor, an upscale Columbus, Ohio restaurant, was profiled in the October 1952 *Gift and Art Buyer*.<sup>39</sup> Ernest Sohn Creations occupied a central display table in an illustration of the new shop. Sohn Pyrex and Sohn chafing dishes were part of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “A Shop in Manhasset,” 48, no. 8 (August 1952): 83-85.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>39</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Maramor,” 48, no. 10 (October 1952): 44-45.

the mix of traditional and more modern items geared towards the Maramor's well-heeled clientele.

Perhaps most revealing of the success and innovation of Sohn's Pyrex line was its almost immediate imitation by other gift firms. Sohn's previous employer Rubel and Company brought out a line of coffee bottles as early as August 1951.<sup>40</sup> Rubel featured its new "hostess servers" in a full-page advertisement in the December 1951 *Crockery and Glass Journal*, figure 2.11.<sup>41</sup> The larger carafe at top right is almost a direct copy of Sohn's forms with the wood handle and the more squat profile being the only differences. The small "Servette" at the middle left nearly replicates Sohn's smaller individual coffee servers except for its rounded bottom.

Sohn continued to utilize Pyrex to create new and innovative designs for many years. An updated version of Sohn's previous Pyrex carafes combined copper or stainless steel with wrought iron in a sleek form and was introduced by the firm in the spring of 1953, figure 2.12.<sup>42</sup> This carafe and warmer were selected by officials of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Merchandise Mart in Chicago for honor in their summer Good Design exhibition which opened in June 1953 at the Mart.<sup>43</sup> This high critical honor was duly noted in the trade press and also brought recognition in the popular press for Sohn's carafe with both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times*

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<sup>40</sup> See *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Merchandise Cues," 47, no. 8 (August 1951): 92.

<sup>41</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Crockery and Glass Journal* 149, no. 6 (December 1951): 39.

<sup>42</sup> The carafe was introduced in the spring, see Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares*, 11, no. 4 (April 1953): 7. The illustrated advertisement, figure 2.12, is Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares*, 12, no. 2 (August 1953): 77.

<sup>43</sup> Museum of Modern Art, *Good Design, June 1953*, ([New York?]: Museum of Modern Art, 1953), item 195. The listing also noted that the "Coffee carafe and warmer" were available for B. Altman for \$9.00.

highlighting it.<sup>44</sup> In the *Times* article the carafe even warranted illustration. The Good Design award was also an effective marketing tool, Orenstein and Sohn proudly employed the Good Design logo in an August 1953 advertisement, figure 2.12.<sup>45</sup> The honor seemed good for sales of the carafe since it was listed in the 1954 Good Design exhibition in a section devoted to “Popular Sellers from Good Design 1950-1954.”<sup>46</sup>

An August 1951 Sohn advertisement in the *Gift and Art Buyer* featured one of Sohn’s Pyrex carafes in combination with a “*Wittcrosse* Warmer,” figure 2.13.<sup>47</sup>

*Wittcrosse* was the line name for a variety of chafing dishes and related warmers and serving items that were Sohn mainstays for many years. What would become Sohn’s trademark chafing dish, figure 2.14, was also the first item that Sohn advertised in July 1951, figure 2.2.<sup>48</sup> With little modesty Sohn called it “The Finest Chafing Dish ever created” and pointed to its beauty and utility. It was made of durable stainless steel “polished to a silver bright lustre, non-tarnishable” with ebonized legs and handles and featured “finger tip heat control, allowing increase or decrease of flame or complete snuffing.” Sohn had the *Wittcrosse* line manufactured by a company located in La

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See Appendix A for more on the Good Design movement in the United States and the Good Design Exhibitions specifically.

<sup>44</sup> *Giftwares*, “Good Design: Summer Selections Emphasize Shiny Surfaces, Bold Colors,” 12, no. 2 (August 1953): 48-49; Betty Pepis, “Home Furnishings Shown at Museum,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1953, 38; and *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “‘Good Design’ Items Offered to Grace Home,” April 25, 1954, F8.

<sup>45</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares*, 12, no. 2 (August 1953): 77.

<sup>46</sup> Museum of Modern Art, *Good Design, Fifth Anniversary*, ([New York?]: Museum of Modern Art, 1954), item 71.

<sup>47</sup> Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 47, no. 8 (August 1951): 15.

<sup>48</sup> Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares and Home Fashions* 7, no. 12 (July 1951): 59 and Ernest Sohn Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 47, no. 7 (July 1951): 15.

Crosse, Wisconsin.<sup>49</sup> Through contacts at Marshall Field's in Chicago Sohn was able to work with Butch Wittenberg, owner of a metal fabricating factory in La Crosse and a skilled machinist. Over a period of several weeks working in the factory with Wittenberg, Sohn was able to create his simple and elegant forms in hard-to-manipulate stainless steel.<sup>50</sup>

Sohn soon expanded the *Wittcrosse* line to include a range of "Buffet and Serving Accessories" as advertised in the *Gift and Art Buyer* in March 1952, figure 2.15.<sup>51</sup> This range of designs could accommodate a variety of serving and cooking needs including sautéing, baking, charcoal grilling and keeping things warm (or cold in case of the ice bucket) on the buffet table. Sohn used a few component parts in several different combinations to create this family of items. The *Wittcrosse* collection is not a wholesale departure from Sohn's previous chafing dish and serving items created in copper and other materials for Rubel.<sup>52</sup> However, this new *Wittcrosse* line was more angular, clean and geometric and more modern than most chafing dishes on the market at the time.

Sohn's use of stainless steel for this new line was quite advanced. Prior to World War II stainless steel was not seen in items for the home and after the war it slowly gained acceptance. Sohn's use of stainless steel in items that would be featured on the dinner table or buffet was quite fresh and interesting in 1951 and 1952. Sohn highlighted

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<sup>49</sup> The information in this section was recorded in interviews by the author with Ernest Sohn on October 18 and November 21, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Sohn considered this a significant accomplishment later in life. The *Wittcrosse* name came out of a conglomeration of the last name of Wittenberg and the name of town where the factory was located.

<sup>51</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 48, no. 3 (March 1952): 11.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 1. Sohn would soon introduce copper as an alternative to stainless steel in the *Wittcrosse* line.

new and innovative use of materials by designers in the giftware field in a November 1952 article for *Giftwares* magazine.<sup>53</sup> Sohn wrote that designers were “no longer limited to ‘traditional’ materials, but are free to roam through the many media that are available in such great abundance.” Sohn extolled the advantages of stainless steel which he called “the sterling of the future” and a “material of unequalled practicality and beauty.”

Whereas silver would easily tarnish and scratch, stainless steel was hard, durable and had a similar beauty to sterling when highly polished, according to Sohn. To take advantage of these new materials and make items that would appeal to consumers by filling their needs, Sohn insisted a designer needed to be both creative and have an extensive knowledge of the materials, how they behave and how they can be manipulated. Here Sohn was writing about himself, about his strong beliefs in what design should be and how a designer should work to become successful.

The *Wittcrosse* line was accepted across the country and was manufactured for decades.<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, B. Altman’s in New York gave Sohn’s chafing dish an early and important feature through its *New Yorker* advertisement (figure 2.4) and promotion in the store itself. This chafing dish was also featured during the 1951 Christmas season on the West Coast. Robinson’s Department Store included it in an advertisement of gift items that were “Handsome to Look At...Delightful to Use” that ran in the *Los Angeles*

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<sup>53</sup> This section refers to Ernest Sohn, “The Changing Taste in Giftwares Materials,” *Giftwares* 10, no. 5 (November 1952): 18.

<sup>54</sup> A May 1967 firm advertisement in an issue of *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* celebrating the history of the gift industry highlighted the Wittcrosse chafing dish with the headline “Good Design Never Grows Old.” The ad indicated the firm had sold “over 100,000 to date,” see Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 127. This particular model of chafing dish continued to be manufactured and retailed by the firm into the 1970s.

*Times*.<sup>55</sup> At the same time Sohn's chafing dishes were highlighted nationally in the shelter magazine *House and Garden*. In the December 1951 issue a Sohn chafing dish is central to an illustration for a buffet, a set-up that "is a good mixer and simplifies service," figure 2.16.<sup>56</sup> The *Wittcrosse* line was again featured the next month in *House and Garden* and continued to be seen in this and other shelter magazines.<sup>57</sup>

The trade press also provides indications of the widespread acceptance of the *Wittcrosse* line through its frequent appearance in a variety of articles on new shops or promotions in 1952 and 1953. Perhaps most interesting were two department store features on American design. The first occurred at Miller and Rhoads, the leading department store of the Richmond, Virginia area, in April 1952.<sup>58</sup> Miller and Rhoads used this "American Design Show," the second of its kind at the store, to satisfy strong customer interest in American-made china, glass and gift items. The promotion involved extensive newspaper advertising, special displays in windows and inside the store, and a variety of special events and activities revolving around American products. One of the firms to be featured in this American design promotion was Sohn's with a highlight on the *Wittcrosse* chafing dish. The "magnificent chafing dish" was "the focal point of contemporary display starring creations of Ernest Sohn."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robinson's, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1951, D28.

<sup>56</sup> *House and Garden*, "Make Music the Point of Your Parties," December 1951, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Nika Standen, "For Sunday-Night Supper Try Cooking With Cheese," *House and Garden*, January 1952, 46-47, 87.

<sup>58</sup> *Giftwares*, "American Giftwares Co-Star in Unprecedented Promotion," 9, no. 5 (June 1952): 33-35

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

A second "American Design Show" was held by the Rochester, New York department store McCurdy's and highlighted by *Crockery and Glass Journal* in December 1952.<sup>60</sup> McCurdy's planned the show "to introduce the public to the newest and best in American table ware and decorative accessories."<sup>61</sup> The show was heavily promoted through the local press and featured representatives from fifteen manufacturers who "were on hand to tell the customers about their products, explain interesting processes, discuss modern trends."<sup>62</sup> Representing Ernest Sohn Creations was Orenstein sales associate Arnold Adler dressed as a chef, figure 2.17, to give customers "a taste of chafing dish cookery" and show them "how easy buffet entertaining can be with proper table and serving accessories" such as the *Wittcrosse* chafing dish.<sup>63</sup> Ernest Sohn Creations was also highlighted in the show program given to customers when they visited the store. The firm was credited for providing resources to the modern hostess: "Jack Orenstein Associates, caterers par excellence to the buffet hostess. Ernest Sohn-designed lazy susans with oven-proof dishes and modernized chafing dishes."<sup>64</sup> It appears that in-store demonstrations like this were fairly common ways of educating, promoting and selling for both the company and department stores across the country.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "McCurdy's Holds American Design Show," 151, no 6 (December 1952): 107-109.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>65</sup> At a November 1952 "Open House" at W. and J. Sloane department store in Beverly Hills, California one of the featured activities was "demonstration of chafing dish cookery by Sohn," see W. and J. Sloane, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1952, A9. A similar promotion was held at Woodward and Lothrop department store in Washington D. C. where customers were invited to "come, see the

While Sohn's *Witterosse* chafing dish took center stage at the McCurdy's show, a lazy susan with ovenproof dishes was also noted in the show program. This piece was part of a third major line of items that were a success for Ernest Sohn Creations in its first few years of business. Sohn and Orenstein began marketing and advertising their first major ceramic collection during the late spring and early summer of 1952.<sup>66</sup> This distinctive and innovative ceramic collection called *Companion Casuals in Copper and Color*, was featured in an advertisement appearing in the July 1952 trade magazines, figure 2.18.<sup>67</sup> In this advertisement we see Ernest Sohn's penchant for combining materials with each piece composed of "Gleaming Copper, wrought iron and Colorful Ceramics."<sup>68</sup> One of the first pieces to be marketed in the *Copper and Color* line was the lazy susan that was mentioned in the McCurdy design show program. This lazy susan was dubbed *Lazy Leaves* and was first highlighted in the trade press in the spring of 1952, figure 2.19.<sup>69</sup> The design recalls Sohn's *Lazy Daisy* for Rubel. It featured individual dishes that hooked onto a central revolving iron stand that could be removed for easy storage and serving. The *Lazy Leaves* dishes and the other *Copper and Color* items were

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wonderful ways to cook and serve with a chafing dish" designed by Ernest Sohn. See Woodward and Lothrop, Advertisement, *The Washington Post*, November 20, 1952, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Earlier collections seem to have existed, this author has discovered little about them. What looks like ceramic casserole dishes on metal stands can be seen in a July 1951 photograph of the new Ernest Sohn Associates showroom, see *Giftwares and Home Fashions*, "People and News of the Trade," 7, no. 12 (July 1951): 74. The first advertisements by Jack Orenstein Associates after the announcement of the partnership with Sohn mentioned "Informality Ovenproof China," see Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 8, no. 6 (January 1952): 9 and *Gift and Art Buyer* 48, no. 1 (January 1952): 11. These early lines may have been experimental stepping stones prior to reaching the *Copper and Color* collection.

<sup>67</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 48, no. 7 (July 1952): 141 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 9, no. 6 (July 1952): 15.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> *Giftwares*, "Buyers at Chicago Market Applaud Modern, Practical Design," 9, no. 2 (March 1952): 24 and *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "New Products," 150, no 5 (May 1952): 50.

noted in the trade press and advertisements for being ovenproof, allowing use of these items to both cook and serve. Another distinctive addition to the *Copper and Color* collection was a large coffee pot and stand that was first advertised by Jack Orenstein in August 1952, figure 2.20.<sup>70</sup> This coffee pot echoes the modernity and geometry found in other Sohn designs of the time with its conical shape and hard angled iron handle and stand. The pot held twenty four cups and stood over fourteen inches tall when resting on its warmer, underlining Sohn's tendency to design on an oversized scale appropriate for home entertainment and buffet serving. A February 1953 advertisement highlighted other "Buffet Accessories" in the *Copper and Color* line that were also oversized and useful in multiple ways for entertainment, figure 2.21.<sup>71</sup> The *Jumbo Casserole* could be used for hot items and also as "an attractive salad server" while the *Party Pail* was even more versatile and could be used for "hot soups, beans, spaghetti or cold ice-cubes, etc."<sup>72</sup>

The *Copper and Color* line quickly found widespread acceptance with buyers and appearances in the national press. *House and Garden* magazine highlighted the *Copper and Color* chafing dish "for modern settings" in a November 1952 feature on Christmas gifts for the household.<sup>73</sup> In the same issue a Boston gift shop featured the *Copper and Color* casserole with warmer in its selection of "Original creations by Ernest Sohn, Fifth

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<sup>70</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 48, no. 8 (August 1952): 129 and *Giftwares* 10, no. 1 (August 1952): 51.

<sup>71</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 49, no. 2 (February 1953): 135.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *House and Garden*, "Christmas Household Gifts," November 1952, 191.

Avenue.”<sup>74</sup> By the following May *Copper and Color* was again being featured in the shopping section of *House and Garden*. The Holiday House shop of Upper Montclair, New Jersey advertised the collection with the headline “For Today’s Living” and said “Designer Ernest Sohn bows to America’s growing taste for casual entertaining in this inspired group of buffet accessories,” figure 2.22.<sup>75</sup> Abraham and Straus in New York also featured *Copper and Color* in its summer offerings that year. A June 15, 1953 advertisement, figure 2.23, highlighted “Ernest Sohn’s design for casual dining!”<sup>76</sup> Abraham and Straus proclaimed the *Copper and Color* servers a “boon to the outdoor hostess who’s bored with barbecues—these handsome servers are the most practical and most decorative pieces of their kind we’ve seen” and had them available in the store’s fourth floor gift shop.<sup>77</sup> A September 1953 Saks Fifth Avenue advertisement in *House and Garden* featured a twin *Copper and Color* casserole set, available at its Guest and Gift Shop in New York, Beverly Hills and Detroit.<sup>78</sup> The set was extolled as “The perfect set-up for dining al fresco....”<sup>79</sup>

*Copper and Color*’s suitability to the post-war lifestyle with its greater informality and casual entertaining was also clear from its depiction editorially in both the trade and popular press. In a November 1952 *Crockery and Glass Journal* feature on “Easy Entertaining” thirty-five leading buyers highlighted the products best suited the

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<sup>74</sup> Chestnut Hill Giftmart, Advertisement, *House and Garden*, November 1952, 94.

<sup>75</sup> Holiday House, Advertisement, *House and Garden*, June 1953, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Abraham and Straus, Advertisement, *New York Times*, June 15, 1953, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Saks Fifth Avenue, Advertisement, *House and Garden*, September 1953, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

strong trend for informal entertainment.<sup>80</sup> The products were selected for the modern day hostess who “wants to enjoy herself at her own parties” and “make entertaining elegant but easy.”<sup>81</sup> Sohn’s *Lazy Leaves* was highlighted in the section of the article on “Easy Storage.”<sup>82</sup> Storage was considered vital to the buyers because entertaining demanded larger parties in homes that often had little storage space. The *Lazy Leaves* server was highlighted because each leaf dish was removable and stackable in a much smaller space than when in use. In the “Buffet Ware” section the *Copper and Color* coffee pot was highlighted.<sup>83</sup> The magazine outlined the buffet trend in this way: “Count in casual trends, lack of dining area, fewer maids: buffet is here to stay.”<sup>84</sup> The magazine characterized the large buffet or cocktail party as the modern equivalent of the formal dinner for eight of previous generations. These large gatherings necessitated large serving items like the Sohn coffee pot.

Sohn *Copper and Color* items were also featured in an October 1953 *House and Garden* article on “New Directions in Dining.”<sup>85</sup> The magazine asserted changes in home life had led the dining room to become less important and defined: “Partly because space is limited, partly because household help is nearly extinct, walls no longer define where we eat.”<sup>86</sup> Entertainment had also become more relaxed according to the

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<sup>80</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, “Easy Entertaining,” 151, no. 5 (November 1952): 19-35.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>85</sup> *House and Garden*, “New Directions in Dining,” October 1953, 156-166.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

magazine: “we have found gay, informal ways to organize large parties. Today, many a party begins at a buffet table set up in an alcove, foyer, or patio and then branches out to small tables and trays with individual place settings.”<sup>87</sup> *House and Garden* tellingly featured *Copper and Color* serving ware in an illustration for “an informal buffet party near the window in your living room,” figure 2.24.<sup>88</sup>

The final group of items that dominated Ernest Sohn Creations’ offerings in its first few years were decorative accessories made from black wrought iron. A March 1952 advertisement displays typical items in the wrought iron range, figure 2.25.<sup>89</sup> While all of these items are useful, they tend toward an emphasis on the decorative: each one might hold a plant or a candle or organize magazines but the decorative flourishes of the wrought iron dominate. The use of black wrought iron during the early 1950s was quite fashionable and was a part of many gift houses’ offerings. Sohn acknowledged the “current vogue” in a November 1952 article where he endorsed the use of wrought iron to create “a pleasing shape... a practical ornament.”<sup>90</sup>

It is interesting to note that what is perhaps the most practical item featured in the March advertisement, the folding stand and tray, is the most free from decorative flourishes and perhaps the best design. A related design, the *Fold-A-Way* table, was

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 163. Only the chafing dish on the right and the sugar and creamer towards the center are Sohn designs.

<sup>89</sup> This section refers to Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 9, no. 2 (March 1952): 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ernest Sohn, “The Changing Taste in Giftwares Materials,” *Giftwares* 10, no. 5 (November 1952): 18.

among the new products introduced by the firm in the summer of 1952, figure 2.26.<sup>91</sup> This sleek, simple and useful design became a critical success when it was selected for inclusion in the Museum of Modern Art's and Merchandise Mart's Good Design exhibition that opened in January 1953 at the Mart in Chicago.<sup>92</sup> Honors such as this one bolstered Ernest Sohn's reputation and added to the success of the firm.

The mid and late 1950s were a time of growth and expansion for Ernest Sohn Creations. Ernest Sohn generated new designs at a furious pace in a large variety of materials. The firm's showrooms expanded in size a number of times while a new fabricating and assembly factory opened in 1956 facilitating the firm's success.<sup>93</sup> The following sections will consider the major groupings or collections of items that were both interesting in their innovations as well as important in the firm's success.<sup>94</sup>

Ernest Sohn Creations introduced two large collections in 1954 that utilized a metal new to the firm, aluminum. Both Sohn and Jack Orenstein had years of experience creating and marketing aluminum gift items at Rubel and Everlast respectively so it was not surprising that the young firm utilized this versatile metal. Ernest Sohn's aluminum

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<sup>91</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Nice to Have Around the House," 48, no. 7 (July 1952): 182. This design was highlighted in a Lord and Taylor advertisement which appeared in *House and Garden* magazine in November 1952, see figure 2.9

<sup>92</sup> Museum of Modern Art, *Good Design, January 1953*, ([New York?]: Museum of Modern Art, 1953), item A10.

<sup>93</sup> For examples of the firm's showroom expansions see *Giftwares*, "What's Doing at 225," 12, no. 2 (August 4, 1953): 100 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 51, no. 7 (July 1955): 145. The "new modern plant" combining warehouse, factory and office space was opened by the firm in Elmhurst, Long Island late in 1956 in order to "facilitate and expedite its customer-service," see *Giftwares*, "What's Doing at 225 Fifth Avenue," 18, no. 5 (November 1956): 40. See also *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Newsfront," 52, no. 11 (November 1956): 16.

<sup>94</sup> Many less interesting, less innovative and less important designs will not be addressed.

collections demonstrate a new and fresh approach to a material that had become familiar to Americans.

Sohn's first aluminum collection was introduced to the trade at the winter gift shows at the beginning of 1954. A full-page advertisement for the new line appeared in the *Gift and Art Buyer* in February 1954, figure 2.27.<sup>95</sup> Here we see Sohn exhibiting another of his key design characteristics. He has reused forms and ideas already created and made them new and interesting by slight modifications and additions. Most of these aluminum items on warming stands follow the general forms he created for his *Copper and Color* ceramics and retain the copper covers while the burners themselves are borrowed from the *Wittcrosse* line. This reuse and adaptation provided two benefits: giving a recognizable style for consumers to associate with the Ernest Sohn Creations brand and to simplify the manufacturing and extend the life of designs once they were created. The reuse and adaptation also allowed Sohn to provide something "new" for buyers in a market that emphasized and preferred the new to a great extent.

The *Giftwares* advertisement suggests the use of the new line in the modern hostess' home. These cooking and serving aids were "For the Living Room Cook," they were to be used on a buffet or coffee table for informal entertainment where the hostess might both cook and serve in the presence of her guests. These items were "Practical—with a thousand uses" according to the firm.<sup>96</sup> Their versatility must have been a selling point for retailers—these aluminum designs were sold for many years. A May 1957 advertisement by the Los Angeles department store Bullocks, figure 2.28, featured the

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<sup>95</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 50, no. 2 (February 1954): 135.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

aluminum designs alongside the *Copper and Color* coffee server under the headline “Smart Ernest Sohn patio serving accessories.”<sup>97</sup> These servers would “make your informal patio serving more attractive and practical.” The next year may have been the final season for this aluminum line. Marshall Field’s in Chicago featured these “versatile serving pieces” under a “manufacturer’s closeout” sale in May 1958.<sup>98</sup>

Ernest Sohn Creations’ second aluminum-based collection was introduced at the trade shows and through the trade press during the summer of 1954. Advertisements in *Giftwares* and *Gift and Art Buyer* introduced *Sonium* in July 1954.<sup>99</sup> The advertisement proclaimed the eponymous line “a new fashion in decorative serving accessories” and emphasized the new group as “coordinated merchandise for oven to table service.”<sup>100</sup> The new line was also launched at a showroom party in June 1954. *Giftwares* noted the new line was “ovenproof, and has detachable black handles” and included chafing dishes, trays, salad bowls and ice buckets.<sup>101</sup> *Sonium* casseroles and serving pan were featured in a August 1954 advertisement in *Gift and Art Buyer*, figure 2.29.<sup>102</sup> Sohn had again worked with his trusted partner Butch Wittenberg in La Crosse, Wisconsin to develop and manufacture these aluminum alloy items.

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<sup>97</sup> Bullocks, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1957, B7.

<sup>98</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1958, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 14, no. 1 (July 1954): 11 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 50, no. 7 (July 1954): 36.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> *Giftwares*, “Trade Tidings,” 14, no. 1 (July 1954): 20.

<sup>102</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 50, no. 8 (August 1954): 131.

Consumer acceptance of the *Sonium* designs was strong, necessitating an increase in production by the end of 1954-early 1955.<sup>103</sup> *Sonium* was by then being retailed in prominent stores across the country. In January 1955 Woodward and Lothrop department store in Washington DC advertised *Sonium* calling it “up-to-date 20<sup>th</sup> Century metal” that was “lightweight, easy to clean, practical.”<sup>104</sup> A few months later W. and J. Sloane in Los Angeles was advertising “New spring accessories for your serving in smart, oven-to-table *Sonium*” and extolled its lightness, durability as well as the line’s unique features such as “removable stay-cool” handles.<sup>105</sup> *Sonium* continued to be produced and retailed by leading stores through the end of the decade.<sup>106</sup>

At the same time Ernest Sohn began to utilize aluminum as a material in his design another metal also became prominent in the firm’s offerings: brass. Sohn began to use brass or brass plated metal in the fall of 1953.<sup>107</sup> By October 1953 the firm was advertising “Elegance in Brass” and featuring candlesticks and a fruit bowl that combined brass and wood, figure 2.30.<sup>108</sup> Sohn soon began utilizing brass for a myriad of products

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<sup>103</sup> Advertisements in January 1955 referred to “unprecedented consumer acceptance” leading to “delay of deliveries” and necessitating expanded production to ship on time. See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 15, no. 1 (January 1954): 25 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 51, no. 1 (January 1954): 71.

<sup>104</sup> Woodward and Lothrop, Advertisement, *Washington Post and Times Herald*, January 16, 1955, 29.

<sup>105</sup> W. and J. Sloane, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1955, C9.

<sup>106</sup> The final advertisement this author has found featuring *Sonium* dates from 1959, see Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 6, 1959, 5.

<sup>107</sup> The trade press first noted Sohn's use of brass in September 1953. *Giftwares* featured an ice bucket with a brass frame in the new products section and also noted that the Wittcrosse line would be offered in brass as well as copper and stainless steel. See *Giftwares*, “Show Stoppers,” 12, no. 3 (September 1953): 34 and *Giftwares*, “Shopping the Markets: Around Los Angeles,” 12, no. 3 (September 1953): 76.

<sup>108</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 12, no. 4 (October 1953): 75.

including magazine holders, serving carts, waste baskets, planters, etc.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps most distinctive and noteworthy was Sohn's use of brass in combination with glass and ceramic for stylish modern serving accessories. The first installment of the brass-accented serving items was introduced during the winter trade shows and was noted in the trade press in the spring of 1954. In February *Crockery and Glass Journal* featured a Pyrex bowl that had been dressed up by Sohn with a brass carrying rack and brass cover, figure 2.31.<sup>110</sup> Sohn had transformed this utilitarian item into something much more glamorous and appropriate for entertaining by combining it with the metal accents. In fact the firm marketed this *Brass and Crystal* line as "Serving Accessories for the Smart Hostess" on promotional tags.<sup>111</sup> The domed cover and thin finial at its center seen on this Pyrex bowl became characteristic of Sohn's brass lines. We see similar finials and covers on white ceramic items combined with brass fittings that *Giftwares* featured in March 1954, figure 2.32.<sup>112</sup> Here Sohn took his idea for combining ceramics with metal to the next level. The metal portions of coffee server and creamer recall the iron fittings that wrapped the *Copper and Color* equivalents but here they are made less geometric, softer, and more elegant with the gold-toned brass handles and covers. The trade journals and firm advertisements continued to feature additions to the brass and glass and brass and china lines throughout 1954 including a shrimp set which artfully held ice, shrimp,

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<sup>109</sup> The firm used brass or brass plated wire to create such items, replacing the wrought iron used in the early 1950s. These items were often fairly conventional and won't be considered here.

<sup>110</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, "New Products from the Pittsburgh Market," 154, no. 2 (February 1954): 45.

<sup>111</sup> Original promotional tag attached to a Pyrex bowl in brass carrying rack in a private collection examined by the author.

<sup>112</sup> *Giftwares*, "Spotlights," 13, no. 3 (March 1954): 54.

sauce and toothpicks all in one unit (see figure 2.41), a double ice bucket and a triple casserole set on warming stand.

Nineteen fifty-five brought further exploration of the brass-and-white-ceramic and brass-and-glass collections by Sohn. In February 1955 the firm advertised a cocktail set that combined a glass cocktail shaker with a brass lid and finial in *Giftwares*, while in *Gift and Art Buyer* they highlighted “Table Accents in White China and Brass,” figure 2.33.<sup>113</sup> Both the cocktail carafe and the coffee pot featured a slight modification to the finial which became the standard finial form: the addition of a disc in the middle with a tapering inward above and below the disk. In the *Gift and Art Buyer* advertisement tall china cups on brass saucers complemented the lithe, elegant form of the coffee pot with its brass bail handle and cover.<sup>114</sup> The sugar (with brass cover) and creamer matching this set stood on a brass tray.<sup>115</sup> Again at midyear Sohn introduced more additions to his very successful brass accented collections. Orenstein and Sohn held a party at 225 Fifth Avenue in late June both celebrating the new lines and the expansion of this growing firm into further showroom space.<sup>116</sup> *Giftwares* noted that buyers from around the country were exposed to Sohn’s deft use of “brass and white china, brass and glass, and brass and walnut combinations” in elegant serving and display items such as those advertised by the firm in August 1955, figure 2.34.<sup>117</sup> With these offerings and others Ernest Sohn

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<sup>113</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 15, no. 2 (February 1955): 55 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 51, no. 2 (February 1955): 117.

<sup>114</sup> These recall the ceramic cups with metal saucers that Sohn had designed earlier for Rubel.

<sup>115</sup> *Giftwares*, “Highlights: New Merchandise at 225 Fifth Avenue,” 15, no. 2 (February 1955): 75.

<sup>116</sup> *Giftwares*, “Party Season Opens Early at 225 Fifth Ave.,” 16, no. 1 (July 1955): 16.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 51, no. 8 (August 1955): 125.

sought to make available items he believed the public desired. Looking ahead to the market of 1956 he said that “people are tiring of the slick, clinical look of extreme modern” and that they “desire merchandise which is simple but which has warmth.”<sup>118</sup>

Sohn’s brand of simple and warm design seems to have struck a chord with store buyers and the American public. Sohn’s brass and glass and brass and china lines were perhaps more widely accepted than any of his previous lines. As early as December 1954 the *Chicago Tribune* cited a Sohn-designed china casserole as an ideal gift for the home.<sup>119</sup> This casserole on brass warming stand with brass cover was available at the leading department store Carson Pirie Scott, which described it in an advertisement that month as “A wonderful serving accessory for buffets, parties” and noted it was “guaranteed ovenproof.”<sup>120</sup> By the following year Sohn’s expanded line of brass accented serving items was seen in prominent shops across the country. One smaller shop that featured Sohn’s brass accented pieces prominently was the Holiday Gift Shop in Penn Yan, New York.<sup>121</sup> This shop in upstate New York catered to a tourist trade and to a local college population and found Sohn items among some of the better sellers. One large display shelf, figure 2.35, featured Sohn brass and china items as well as other Sohn designs.

Betty Pepis of the *New York Times* selected perhaps the most monumental of all the brass and china items, the oversized samovar or coffee urn, for inclusion in an article

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<sup>118</sup> *Giftwares*, “Gift Wholesalers at 225 Look Forward to Fine Business—1956,” 17, no. 2 (February 1956): 67.

<sup>119</sup> Anne Douglas, “Gifts for the Home,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 8, 1954, A1.

<sup>120</sup> Carson Pirie Scott, Advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 1, 1954, 19.

<sup>121</sup> *Giftwares*, “Relaxed Atmosphere Draws Customers,” 16, no. 3 (September 1955): 45-47.

on “Fresh Accents For the Home” in Sunday magazine section in the paper’s October 16, 1955 issue, figure 2.36.<sup>122</sup> The curvaceous form of the samovar with its simple stand and cover warranted its inclusion in this article dedicated to items that might refresh a room through their “look of individuality.” Significantly Pepis noted all the items she selected had in common “a polished, rich quality very much in keeping with today’s trend toward elegance.” While the high price of the samovar may have been out of reach for most customers, this piece was used by a variety of prominent stores to attract interest in Ernest Sohn’s other brass accented offerings and to their gift departments generally.<sup>123</sup> The samovar was prominently displayed like a beacon above a range of brass and china Sohn designs in a B. Altman’s display at their Manhasset, New York branch illustrated in the January 1956 *Gift and Art Buyer*.<sup>124</sup> Sohn’s samovar was also prominently featured in the new contemporary gift shop floor added to tony New York jeweler Black, Starr and Gorham, which was featured by *Giftwares* in August 1956.<sup>125</sup> Alongside the samovar were a variety of Sohn china casseroles with brass warming stands and covers. Again the samovar made a prominent appearance at a new branch of Gimbels which opened in February 1957 in suburban Pittsburgh.<sup>126</sup> At this new branch the gift shop occupied a prominent location on the first floor and the samovar provided a central focus in a circular display of various Sohn-designed serving items.

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<sup>122</sup> This section refers to Betty Pepis, “Fresh Accents for the Home,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1955, SM52.

<sup>123</sup> Pepis noted it was available for \$29.95 at Saks Fifth Avenue.

<sup>124</sup> Walter Kleinschrod, “Opportunities: Clocks and Barometers,” *Gift and Art Buyer* 52, no. 1 (January 1956): 75.

<sup>125</sup> *Giftwares*, “Contemporary Design Prevails in Better Gifts,” 18, no. 2 (August 4, 1956): 36-37.

<sup>126</sup> *Giftwares*, “Gift Departments in Shopping Center Branches,” 19, no. 6 (June 1957): 46.

Advertisements by various department stores also suggested possible uses for these wares and indicate the popularity of Sohn's brass and glass and brass and china lines. Items and collections of items were advertised by leading stores in Washington, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles over a dozen times in 1955 and 1956 in the cities' most prominent newspapers: the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>127</sup>

A prominent May 1956 Marshall Field's advertisement featured Sohn designs as well as those of his competitor Georges Briard and suggests a reason why these designs were so popular, figure 2.37.<sup>128</sup> Here Field's highlights the fit between Ernest Sohn's designs and the postwar American lifestyle. The advertisement proclaims America "a party loving country where informality keynotes the best parties..."<sup>129</sup> Field's notes the "buffet in white and gilt" highlighted by Sohn's designs typifies the most informal, most American form of entertaining.<sup>130</sup>

Again we see the most telling reflection of Sohn's brass and glass and brass and china lines' success in the fact that other gift houses mimicked them. While a general move in the gift industry toward using brass as an accent metal became apparent in 1954, Ernest Sohn's style of combining brass with other materials was one of the most widely copied.<sup>131</sup> Rubel and Company advertised coffee servers and casseroles on stands in June

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<sup>127</sup> The author has discovered at least 13 separate advertisements for these items through the use of the Proquest Historical Newspapers Database.

<sup>128</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 21, 1956, 25.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Brass seemed to replace wrought iron as the favorite accent metal in the giftware field at this time.

1955, figure 2.38.<sup>132</sup> The forms of the Rubel casseroles especially recall Sohn's designs. The following year brought yet another close copy by a competing gift house: in July 1956 Everlast advertised their *Primavera* collection which combined white ceramic with brass stands and covers, figure 2.39.<sup>133</sup> While the collection does have a distinctive style it draws on Sohn's designs heavily, down to the brass saucers for the demitasse cups. Items that closely mimicked some of Sohn's most popular brass accented pieces continued to be introduced by other gift houses through at least 1958.<sup>134</sup>

While some competitors drew heavily on Sohn for inspiration, others wasted no effort and simply copied his designs wholesale. One such company was Quon Quon Co. whose brass and china offerings were highlighted in the *Gift and Art Buyer* in October 1956, figure 2.40.<sup>135</sup> In response to this and other wholesale copying of the Sohn's designs, the firm ran an advertisement denouncing "Piracy of Design," figure 2.41.<sup>136</sup> The advertisement loftily quoted John Ruskin to correlate copying with cheaper and lesser quality goods and illustrated the three most copied designs. Orenstein and Sohn used this prominent advertisement to offer these most popular items at a lower cost, thus turning a problem into a further success for the company.

Ernest Sohn continued to use brass and white china in his designs for several years. One design that stands above all the rest was a samovar or large beverage server

<sup>132</sup> Rubel and Company, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer*, 51, no. 6 (June 1955): 7.

<sup>133</sup> Everlast, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 18, no. 1 (July 1956): 37.

<sup>134</sup> See Pitman-Dreitzer and Co., Advertisement, *Giftwares* 21, no. 6 (June 1958): 44.

<sup>135</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Color, Style, Profit In New Tableware Offerings," 52, no. 10 (October 1956): 91. These examples are so close to Sohn's this author first thought they had been misattributed by the trade journal.

introduced by Sohn in the summer of 1958, figure 2.42.<sup>137</sup> This extraordinary item with its undulating ceramic body held aloft by a brass stand shows Sohn's design at its most exuberant and playful. This enormous piece, rising nearly two feet above the tabletop, held an extraordinary fifty cups of liquid.<sup>138</sup> The samovar did not escape the attention of at least one prominent publication: the *New York Times* featured it in an article on "Entertaining Made Easy" in September 1958.<sup>139</sup> The article noted "new table and buffet accessories for entertaining at home are decorative as well as practical."<sup>140</sup>

Practicality was one of the key characteristics in Ernest Sohn's design philosophy, a characteristic that can be discerned in another major line introduced in the summer of 1956: *Georgian*. This line marked the first time that Sohn utilized historical forms or ideas in his designs since his time at Rubel. *Georgian* was first advertised in the trade journals in July 1956, figure 2.43.<sup>141</sup> A party on June 19 at the firm's showrooms was highlighted by this line which combined, as the *Gift and Art Buyer* noted, "Georgian design with contemporary styling."<sup>142</sup> Sohn used his characteristic simple, clean taste to create forms that recall the past in their paneled bodies with handles that evoke those of historic metal beverage pots. Sohn and the firm were undoubtedly responding to a

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<sup>136</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 52, no. 6 (June 1956): 10.

<sup>137</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 54, no. 8 (August 1958): 105.

<sup>138</sup> An example in a private collection examined by the author stands approximately 23 inches high.

<sup>139</sup> *New York Times*, "Entertaining Made Easy," September 21, 1958, SMA34

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* This piece is certainly decorative but practical when filled with over three gallons of liquid is another question entirely.

<sup>141</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 18, no. 1 (July 1956): 47 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 52, no. 7 (July 1956): 35.

<sup>142</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Pages from a 225 Reporter's Notebook," 52, no. 8 (August 1956): 168.

growing demand for more formality in design and an upsurge in the ever-present American love affair with historic forms. The *Georgian* pieces followed closely on the success of Sohn's brass and ceramic designs but here the metal handle was replaced with ceramic, molded and gilded to fool the eye. The finials however retain Sohn's penchant for combination of materials, they are made of brass attached through holes in the tops of the lids.<sup>143</sup>

While the *Georgian* line seems to have included a range of serving accessories, the beverage pots were the best sellers.<sup>144</sup> The firm introduced at least two teapot forms, one of which was strangely curvaceous for this line and another that echoes the straight paneled sides of the other *Georgian* items, figure 2.44.<sup>145</sup> The *Georgian* line also marked the first time that the firm introduced a combination automatic coffeemaker and server. This new innovation combined a ceramic pot with an interior metal mechanism that would brew coffee through a percolation method when the pot was plugged into an electrical outlet. After the coffee was brewed the brewing mechanism could be removed and the pot unplugged for serving.

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<sup>143</sup> This analysis is based on examples in a private collection examined by the author.

<sup>144</sup> The author has discovered a covered casserole dish on stand as well as a salad bowl in trade journal illustrations, see *Giftwares*, "A Product Panorama," 18, no. 2 (August 4, 1956): 60 and *Giftwares*, Gift Departments in Shopping Center Branches," 19, no. 6 (June 1957): 46. While the *Georgian* line was not heavily promoted by major department stores through advertisements (to date the author has found no advertisements for this line), the coffee pots and coffee sets must have sold reasonably well due to their fairly regular appearance on the secondary market today.

<sup>145</sup> The first was illustrated in *Giftwares*, see *Giftwares*, "Gifts Ready for the Early Bird Market," 18, no. 6 (December 1956): 42. For the second see *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Merchandise Highlights," 53, no. 1 (January 1957): 96.

Sohn was able to create this percolator model due to a new partnership with Hall China Company of East Liverpool, Ohio.<sup>146</sup> Hall had been in business over fifty years and was known for making ceramics for use in both home and institutional settings.<sup>147</sup> Hall was especially well known for creating highly durable ceramics for use in the kitchen, ceramics regularly exposed to the high temperatures and stresses of hot ovens and boiling liquids. In Hall Ernest Sohn gained a partner able to produce high quality ceramics on a larger scale and more inexpensively than before. With Hall he also gained a ceramic body that could withstand great stresses, like the high heat of the electric percolator mechanism seen in the *Georgian Automatic*.<sup>148</sup>

In 1957 Ernest Sohn Creations began to use another material prominently: wood. While Sohn had utilized wood prior to 1957, it was in this year that wood took a more central role and remained a staple in the firm's offerings from this time forward.<sup>149</sup> Two collections were introduced at the winter trade shows of 1957: *Style Trends* and *Vestaware*. *Style Trends* was a variety of serving accessories crafted from mahogany

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<sup>146</sup> While it is clear that Hall China primarily produced Ernest Sohn's ceramics beginning with the *Georgian* line, it is not exactly clear when this partnership started. It seems most of the brass and china line was also produced by Hall which was confirmed by communications in 2005 and 2006 between the author and Hall researchers Gary and Paula Barneby who have consulted the Hall company archives. At least one period advertisement confirms that the ceramic parts of some Sohn brass and china items were made by Hall, see Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1956, B1. Also the author has discovered ceramic casserole dishes from Sohn's brass and china line with a standard Hall mark of the time.

<sup>147</sup> For more information on the Hall company and its products see Gary and Paula Barneby, *Hall China Tea and Coffee Pots*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2005), Jeffrey Snyder, *Hall China*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2002), Margaret and Ken Whitmyer, *Collector's Encyclopedia of Hall China 3rd Edition*, (Paducah, KY: Collector's Books, 2001.)

<sup>148</sup> The ceramic body of Sohn items prior to the partnership with Hall was less durable and more prone to cracking and crazing when subjected to heat stresses based on those examined by the author in private collections. This is not seen in Hall produced items. Ernest Sohn could not recall who produced his ceramics before Hall in an interview with the author conducted March 16, 2006.

<sup>149</sup> Wood was used in the ebonized finials, handles and legs of Sohn's *Wittcrosse* line from their introduction in 1951 and also appeared combined with brass in decorative accessories in 1956.

such as those illustrated in the firm's February 1957 advertisement seen in figure 2.45.<sup>150</sup> In addition to the trays and ice bucket illustrated, the line featured a variety of items like cheese boards and salad bowl sets in what the firm called "teak-finished mahogany."<sup>151</sup> The allusion to teak was likely a calculated one; high style furniture and decorative accessories from a variety of Danish and other Scandinavian designers were very well known in the United States by this time. These items, often made from teak, were climbing toward their height of popularity with the American public. Sohn and his firm were likely responding most specifically to the offerings of Dansk, a young firm that by 1957 had gained much notoriety and a large volume of sales in the gift field for a variety of items including staved teak accessories.<sup>152</sup>

While Sohn's *Style Trends* wood designs were attractive but not greatly innovative, the *Vestaware* line the firm introduced at the same time was something new and more interesting. The line was first advertised in February 1957, figure 2.46.<sup>153</sup> Here Sohn used his characteristic combinations of materials to create ensembles of wood, pottery and glass. While Sohn's use of elongated and simple forms in pale blue pottery

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<sup>150</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 19, no. 2 (February 1957): 39.

<sup>151</sup> This wording, which undoubtedly came from the firm itself, was used by the trade journals describing new items in the line, see *Giftwares*, "New Merchandise is Ready," 19, no. 1 (January 1957): 64 and *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Merchandise Highlights," 53, no. 4 (April 1957): 47.

<sup>152</sup> Dansk and its chief designer Jens Quistgaard rose to prominence in the United States in 1955 when his work was featured at several leading department stores, see *Giftwares*, "Young Danish Designer Visits California," 16, no. 6 (December 1955). While Dansk began to advertise in the trade press in 1956, it was January 1957 when the company ran its first prominent advertisements, a clear indication of their quick success in the American market. This first full-page advertisement featured several examples of the firm's designs in teak, see Dansk Designs Inc., Advertisement, *Giftwares* 19, no. 1 (January 1957): 48 and *Gift and Art Buyer* 53, no. 1 (January 1957): 69.

<sup>153</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 19, no. 1 (January 1957): 25 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 53, no. 2 (February 1957): 113.

and the wood warming stands and covers evoke Scandinavian design of the time, Sohn's unique combination of materials is all his own.<sup>154</sup> This attractive combination seemed to strike an immediate interest among the press and buyers. The *New York Times* pictured the *Vestaware* ceramic coffee pot as well as another *Vestaware* beverage server, this one a Pyrex carafe with a wood collar at its neck, both on wood warming stands, in a feature titled "It Is a Wise Wife Who Serves the Coffee Hot" in March 1957.<sup>155</sup> In July Cecelia Schaeffer of the *Chicago Tribune* highlighted *Vestaware* in the paper's regular column on "What's New in the Kitchen."<sup>156</sup> Schaeffer remarked on the pleasing contrast between the wood of the warmer and cover, the brass of the finial and the pale blue of the pottery. She also emphasized that these casseroles were "Ideal for wedding gifts, for a new home, or for dining in the patio" since each possessed a second cover of the same "high glaze ovenware" allowing for cooking in the same dish before the covers were switched for serving.<sup>157</sup> Advertisements by leading department stores such as Marshall Field's in Chicago and B. Altman's in New York, figure 2.47, featured Sohn's new collection and also emphasized its versatility and the pleasing contrasts between materials.<sup>158</sup>

By late 1958-early 1959 Ernest Sohn had further refined the combination of wood, pottery and metal with the introduction of his *Doric* line. In *Doric* Sohn created

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<sup>154</sup> The firm's name for the line also evokes Scandinavia to this author's ear despite the fact that its root, Vesta, is the ancient Roman goddess of the hearth and home. Significantly the pale blue color of the pottery was called "iced blue" by the firm, see *Giftwares*, "In the Works for January," 18, no. 6 (December 1956): 41.

<sup>155</sup> *New York Times*, "It Is a Wise Wife Who Serves the Coffee Hot," March 23, 1957, 15.

<sup>156</sup> Cecelia Schaeffer, "Handsome China Casseroles Keep Food Piping Hot," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1957, B16.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> See Marshall Field and Company, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1957, B3 and B. Altman and Co., Advertisement, *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, 65.

some of his most beautiful designs in what was probably his most successful ceramic line. A December 1958 advertisement previewed the line that the firm would feature at the winter trade shows, figure 2.48.<sup>159</sup> The bulbous forms of the coffee pot, creamer and sugar bowl are some of Sohn's most curvaceous. Other pieces in this extensive line shared a curving or rounded profile while a few had a more geometric edge, figure 2.49. All shared the delicate fluting that is alluded to in the line's name. Most pieces came with warming stands that combine brass plated metal and walnut or sat on wooden trays. One casserole dish has a walnut cover while another has only a wooden finial. Other finials were made of brass. In *Doric* Sohn again mixed materials in the line's cups and saucers, this time ceramic cups on wooden saucers.<sup>160</sup> One of Sohn's signature forms, the large samovar or coffee server, sits on a wooden platform on which a brass alcohol burner and brass stand hold aloft the capacious ceramic body with its brass and wood spigot.

The elegant forms and unique combinations of *Doric* seemed to have struck the fancy of buyers and the public generally. The line became a special favorite of the *Los Angeles Times*, which featured various *Doric* pieces editorially five times in 1959, including three consecutive Sundays in June.<sup>161</sup> The line seemed to have appealed to the writers and editors because it could easily be mixed with other dishes and was

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<sup>159</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 54, no. 12 (December 1958): 90.

<sup>160</sup> For the cups and saucers see *Giftwares*, "Ring in the New, Showtime in Chicago," 23, no. 1 (January 1959): 30 and *Los Angeles Times*, "Bright Touches for the Table," June 21, 1959, L60.

<sup>161</sup> See *Los Angeles Times*, "Table Accents," June 7, 1959, J38; *Los Angeles Times*, "Accent Marks for Decorative Themes," June 14, 1959, J42; *Los Angeles Times*, "Bright Touches for the Table," June 21, 1959, L60; Barbara Lenox, "Summer Servers," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1959, JJ20; *Los Angeles Times*, "Practical Presents," December 6, 1959, I34.

appropriate for casual and more formal settings. In November 1959 the *Chicago Tribune* also selected *Doric* to highlight in a story about “a special showing of home accessories and giftwares by Ernest Sohn” that was “on display in Marshall Field and Company’s second floor ‘Casual Living’ section.”<sup>162</sup> The paper characterized Sohn as a distinguished designer best known for serving accessories that combined a variety of materials in interesting ways.<sup>163</sup> An advertisement for the leading New York department store B. Altman’s featured the *Doric* line and other Sohn creations as gift suggestions in an advertisement a month later in mid December 1959, figure 2.50.<sup>164</sup> Perhaps most interesting in the Altman advertisement is the lazy susan at the bottom center. Sohn had again reinterpreted one of his signature forms: each of the ceramic petal-shaped dishes could be removed for serving and storage. The Altman advertisement also shows that Sohn had integrated wood in combination with other materials, notably in the bent glass shrimp server with walnut handles and in the ice bucket with a wooden knob. The *Doric* line’s success continued unabated at least through the mid-1960s. It continued to be featured prominently in advertisements by leading stores across the country including the Broadway Stores of Los Angeles which highlighted *Doric* as a “Classic” in May 1965, figure 2.51.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “Designer Ernest Sohn’s Accessories on Display,” November 22, 1959, A7.

<sup>163</sup> The article also exaggerated Sohn’s formal training greatly.

<sup>164</sup> B. Altman and Co., Advertisement, *New York Times*, December 18, 1959, 8.

<sup>165</sup> Broadway Stores, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1965, E3. This was one of the last retail advertisements for *Doric*.

### Chapter 3

Ernest Sohn Creations was already a major success by the end of the 1950s, a success the firm would build upon through the 1960s. Ernest Sohn Creations' growth mirrored that of the gift industry itself, which also expanded greatly through the 1950s, well surpassing the billion dollar retail sales mark during the latter half of the decade.<sup>1</sup> As the industry grew and the country's population migrated, other regional centers became more and more important. One sign of this was the opening of a third Ernest Sohn Creations showroom in Dallas in the summer of 1959 in order to serve the growing southwestern United States.<sup>2</sup>

Ernest Sohn was not at a loss to fill this expanded showroom space. The pace of new designs introduced by the firm seemed to grow with each passing year. In 1960 Sohn introduced two major collections: *Riviera* and *Contessa*. *Riviera* was introduced during the winter trade shows and first advertised in the trade magazines in February 1960, figure 3.1.<sup>3</sup> The advertisement noted that this group of "Sophisticated Buffet Accessories in Ovenproof China" was available in several colors as well as white. In *Riviera* we see Ernest Sohn at his most elegant and modern, figure 3.2. The shapes are pared-down cylinders accented by precise handles and concave covers. The use of color provided the only decoration on these simple forms.

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<sup>1</sup> Industry estimates marked this milestone as happening in 1956. By 1959 a volume of \$1,175,000,000 was estimated, see Walter Kleinschrod, "Editorial: Challenge of the 60's," *Gift and Art Buyer* 55, no. 10 (October 1959): 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Giftwares*, "On Location: Southwest," 24, no. 1 (July 1959): 65 and *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Going on in the Trade," 55, no. 7 (July 1959): 132.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 25, no. 2 (February 1960): 45 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 56, no. 2 (February 1960): 121.

This fairly stark aesthetic did not seem to please all buyers. The line was soon offered with the addition of a floral pattern and brass covers and stands for certain pieces, (figure 3.2, at right.)<sup>4</sup> This bow to more conservative tastes was characterized by *Giftwares* as bridging “the gap between traditional and contemporary.”<sup>5</sup> The decorated version seems to have been more saleable to buyers including those at B. Altman’s which featured the collection the following year in an “Event for summer entertaining,” figure 3.3.<sup>6</sup> Altman’s noted the “Pastel floral pattern on white ground mixes with other china patterns, makes gracious addition to your own service.”<sup>7</sup> In other words this collection would integrate with other more traditional dishware. The more conservatively decorated *Riviera* proved to have greater appeal. This taste was underlined when rival firm Lipper and Mann copied the form in inexpensive Japanese china and applied a decorative pattern to it as part of their “Mardi Gras Assortments” introduced in early 1961, figure 3.4.<sup>8</sup>

The second major collection of the 1960s, *Contessa*, was introduced at the summer trade shows and first advertised in August 1960, figure 3.5.<sup>9</sup> Here Sohn further adapted to the strong taste in 1960s America for things that evoked the past. The forms

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<sup>4</sup> The decal pattern, called *Bouquet*, was originally based on hand-painted floral designs created by Stig Lindberg for Gustavsberg pottery of Sweden in the late 1940s and early 1950s. *Bouquet* was originally applied to Eva Zeisel’s *Tomorrows Classic* shape, which was also produced by Hall China starting in 1952.

<sup>5</sup> *Giftwares*, “Shopping 225,” 26, no. 2 (August 4, 1960): 63.

<sup>6</sup> B. Altman and Co., Advertisement, *New York Times*, July 9, 1961, 36. It is interesting to note that Sohn has in typical fashion reused a preexisting shape, the large coffee urn from the brass and china collection, to serve the same function in this *Riviera* grouping.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The coffee pot at mid left, creamer and sugar by it and the casserole at top center are clearly copied for Sohn’s *Riviera* designs, see Lipper and Mann, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 57, no. 1 (January 1961): 71.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 26, no. 2 (August 1960): 51 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 56, no. 8 (August 1960): 137.

pictured in the advertisement are still fairly simple; however, their pronounced foot rims and heavy gilding at top and bottom with a pseudo coat of arms in gold at center are much less modern. Other items in the *Contessa* line included glass serving trays and barware with the same emblem applied in gold as well as a group of paneled shapes which were borrowed from Sohn's earlier *Georgian* collection, figure 3.6. Finials for most of the ceramics are in the form of stylized pineapples cast in metal and gilded, again evoking an eighteenth-century inspiration. *Contessa's* more conservative detailing was endorsed by buyers who stocked it in prominent stores across the country for several years.<sup>10</sup>

In 1961 the firm again introduced two major collections, one ceramic and one metal. The ceramic collection, called the *Butter Mould Line*, was a calculated effort by the firm to tie into public interest in what was known as Early American or Americana, an interest that grew ever stronger in the early 1960s. *Giftwares* magazine characterized this public appetite in the summer of 1960: "Americana is money in the till for most gift retailers."<sup>11</sup> *Giftwares* outlined three main groupings of Americana including one that "makes use of Early American motifs and styles, but makes no attempt to reproduce the original artifact's shape or function."<sup>12</sup> In the *Butter Mould Line* Ernest Sohn did just this. February 1961 advertisements introducing the line, figure 3.7, showed three typical

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<sup>10</sup> See B. Altman and Co., Advertisement, *New York Times*, November 27, 1960, SM93; Continental Merchandise Mart, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1961, WS7; Broadway Stores, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1963, K4.

<sup>11</sup> Hazel Kleban, "Americana for Today," *Giftwares* 25, no. 6 (June 1960): 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Sohn forms, forms that were included in all of his ceramic buffet services.<sup>13</sup> Sohn used antique butter molds from his personal collection to create the decorative motifs and reinforced the idea of the old and the handmade with the addition of closely spaced lines circling the exteriors of the pieces suggesting that they had been thrown on a wheel.<sup>14</sup> The colors, “Jade and Mahogany,” also added to the antique feel of the line with the brown coming close to Rockingham glazed wares of the nineteenth century, figure 3.8. The firm’s promotion of the line strongly tied into the appetite for Americana. A promotional tag attached to items read “The “Butter Mould” is the trade-mark of our early American tradition. The designs represent original patterns created by our colonial artisans.”<sup>15</sup> The spelling of “Mould” itself reinforces this antique association. Perhaps only the bamboo and metal warming stands contradicted the nostalgic connection, although this natural material does not seem entirely incongruous.

Response to the *Butter Mould Line* was favorable. The *Los Angeles Times* featured *Butter Mould* in an illustrated two-page spread one Sunday in March as something new and interesting but yet “Reminiscent of the Past.”<sup>16</sup> Leading stores like Lord and Taylor featured it across the country.<sup>17</sup> Ramsey’s Corner, a leading gift shop in Salt Lake City, featured the *Butter Mould Line* in a table display suggesting buffet

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Giftwares* 27, no. 2 (February 1961): 37 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 57, no. 2 (February 1961): 131.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Sohn had several examples of butter molds on display in his home in the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006 and mentioned to the author that he had lent the one used to create the *Butter Mould* motif to a Red Wing Pottery convention several years before. The *Butter Mould Line* was unusual for Sohn in that it was produced by Red Wing Pottery of Red Wing, Minnesota, not Hall China.

<sup>15</sup> Tag came attached to a casserole cover in a private collection examined by the author.

<sup>16</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Reminiscent of the Past,” March 26, 1961, 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> Lord and Taylor, Advertisement, *New York Times*, May 14, 1961, 35. Lord and Taylor also had its own exclusive glaze on the line, noted as “a rich butter-gold” in the advertisement.

service, figure 3.9.<sup>18</sup> The shop highlighted typical Sohn pieces including the samovar or coffee urn and an open fondue dish on warmer as well as the more unusual mushroom-shaped salt and pepper shakers. The *Butter Mould Line* was quite appropriate to this shop selling a typically diverse array of items ranging from modern to the more traditional.

While the *Butter Mould Line* certainly reinforced the firm's "made in America for Americans" emphasis in 1961, Sohn's other major line in metal was a bit more exotic.<sup>19</sup> The *Prado Collection Hand Forged*, although made in the United States, sought to take advantage of the fashion for Spanish-inspired design that was strong at the time. This forged iron collection, as seen in a March 1961 advertisement, figure 3.10, was a highly decorative group of occasional furniture, such as the featured table and screen, as well as other accessories like candlesticks, plant stands and magazine baskets.<sup>20</sup> While the *Prado* collection was keyed to a significant home-furnishing trend, Ernest Sohn later recalled it was not terribly successful and was promoted by only a few stores.<sup>21</sup>

The second part of 1961 brought another expansion of the firm's showroom space as the main office in 225 Fifth Avenue was doubled in size.<sup>22</sup> One new group of items that helped to fill this added space was a selection of serving accessories, bookends and smoking paraphernalia that combined wood (rosewood or, more commonly, walnut) with

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<sup>18</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, "Take Color, Comfort, Blend with Care," 57, no. 5 (May 1961): 38. Another typical Sohn form, a lazy susan with five removable dishes, was also part of the *Butter Mould* collection, see *Giftwares*, "Product Spotlight," 27, no. 5 (May 1961): 25.

<sup>19</sup> This slogan was noted in *Giftwares*, "Shopping the Market: East," 27, no. 1 (January 1961): 85.

<sup>20</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 57, no. 3 (March 1961): 126.

<sup>21</sup> Interview by the author with Ernest Sohn on October 18, 2005. This author has only found one advertisement that promoted *Prado*, a table was included in a Spanish themed promotion; see Broadway Stores, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1963, 9.

<sup>22</sup> See *Giftwares*, "On Location: East," 27, no. 6 (June 1961): 40.

inset plaques of enameled metal, figure 3.11.<sup>23</sup> Sohn had previously combined wood with decorated tile insets but it was with the enamel and wood items that the firm had a great success.<sup>24</sup> This sort of enamel and wood design continued to be produced by the firm for several years. The motifs on the enamel were highly decorative, with certain patterns bordering on the saccharine. Other patterns were more abstracted and elegant, showing Ernest Sohn's willingness to produce a range of items to appeal to different tastes. One of Sohn's most notable designs in this line, in many ways very typical of Sohn, was a casserole on stand, figure 3.12. In this piece Sohn had reused existing forms, a casserole dish from the brass and china line and a *Doric* warming stand, with a cover that combined both wood and enameled copper. The combination of so many materials in a single item is very characteristic of Sohn and in this case quite charming.

At the end of 1961 Ernest Sohn was asked by the trade journal *Gift and Art Buyer* to write about his predictions for the "style trends" for the following season.<sup>25</sup> This article sheds light on Sohn's design philosophy at the time and accounts for the emphasis on decorative and historical touches that were stronger during the rest of his career. Sohn stated his belief that a designer is not an artist or fashion leader who shapes the public's tastes. For Sohn the commercial aspect was first and foremost: "The designer must be first of all a merchandiser who is supposed to have a kind of sixth sense of what might

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<sup>23</sup> These items were noted in *Giftwares*, "Shopping 225," 28, no. 2 (August 4, 1961): 50.

<sup>24</sup> This conclusion is based on the extensive advertisement of these items by department stores as well their frequent appearance in the secondary market as noted by this author.

<sup>25</sup> This section refers to *Gift and Art Buyer*, ed., "The Year Ahead," 57, no. 12 (December 1961): 50, 96, 102.

sell next season.”<sup>26</sup> The designer, according to Sohn, was someone who could create objects for a certain clientele at a certain price. In his case this was “the broad middle class of the United States.”<sup>27</sup> Sohn reasoned that a designer of mass-produced objects could not create extreme changes in style or color; such changes would not be accepted by the buying public and would only be applauded by a few critics with highly sophisticated tastes. The designer instead must consider what his buying public might desire and how each item might fit in with their existing style or preferences. Sohn realized that the American public largely desired the traditional: “What is the ‘trend?’ The traditional qualities of Early American, Continental Regency, or Empire, Chippendale or Oriental are the motifs that are predominant and desired by our buyers.”<sup>28</sup> Sohn indicated that these traditional motifs would be incorporated into his collections. However, Sohn also spoke as an artist: “Sometimes [we] forget ourselves and create as we would like to create—simple, classic forms of utility, where the materials used suggest the form....”<sup>29</sup> It is between the decorative historical references and the simple and utilitarian that Sohn’s designs continued to hover.

Ernest Sohn Creations and Jack Orenstein Associates again expanded in 1962, this time opening showroom space in the new Atlanta Merchandise Mart.<sup>30</sup> Atlanta had become an increasingly important center for wholesaling in the southeast United States. Within the new and the old showroom spaces the firm unveiled a myriad of designs for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 96

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 96, 102.

<sup>30</sup> *Gift and Art Buyer*, “News of the Industry,” 58, no. 1, (January 1962): 149.

the year. In January 1962 the firm advertised the *Tuliptime* group, figure 3.13.<sup>31</sup> *Tulip-Lites*, decorative candle holders of metal and colored glass, came in three assorted sizes.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps more interesting was the ceramic collection also highlighted in the advertisement. This collection, known as *Petal*, included the full range of typical Sohn offerings in a buffet service: lazy susans, serving dishes, samovar, casseroles, coffee pot, etc.<sup>33</sup> Their lobed forms suggest large gourds or squash, echoed by the metal finials replicating stalks.<sup>34</sup> In typical Sohn fashion these buffet service items often were accompanied by metal warming stands, each plated in gold for added luxury. In *Petal* Ernest Sohn reincarnated the botanical forms first used by eighteenth-century European ceramic factories but stripped them down to his signature simple shapes with no decoration. The forms themselves and their proportions made pleasing, whimsical designs that would appeal to many buyers.

In July 1962 Jack Orenstein Associates mounted its largest ever promotion of Ernest Sohn Creations.<sup>35</sup> The firm took a dozen pages of the leading trade journal, *Gift and Art Buyer*, to publish a catalog of the huge variety of the “many useful and decorative home products” then available. Each page was devoted to a different grouping of products such as trays, “Walnut and Pewter,” candleholders, “Susans and Servers,” etc. Two consecutive pages were devoted to “Gifts in Gold” and “Stainless Steel”

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<sup>31</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 58, no. 1 (January 1962): 48.

<sup>32</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 58, no. 3 (March 1962): 67.

<sup>33</sup> See *Gift and Art Buyer*, “Industry News: Brack Shops Los Angeles,” 58, no. 2, (February 1962): 176.

<sup>34</sup> While the forms are botanical in inspiration they do not seem to represent the petals the line name suggests.

respectively, figure 3.14.<sup>36</sup> Here we see a good example of Sohn's versatility and ability to appeal to a wide-ranging market. The gold-plated metal designs appealed to those interested in more traditional and luxurious motifs and also provided coordinating items that could be teamed with Sohn's *Petal* ceramic ware. The stainless steel items show Sohn's design work at its most modern and progressive. The shapes are generally simple and straightforward with little connection to the past. The simple forms in the modern material of stainless steel are softened slightly with accents in wood. The chafing dish at the bottom right is particularly notable since it is the updated version of one of Sohn's original successes, *Wittcrosse*. This version also became quite a success for the company and was sold widely and even was used to symbolize chafing dish cookery on the cover of a popular cookbook about the subject, figure 3.15.<sup>37</sup> The final page of the advertising section highlighted "Buffet Services in fine ovenproof china in our famous patterns *Doric, Petal, Contessa*," another important portion of the firm's business.<sup>38</sup>

The years 1963 and 1964 brought greater exploration of existing Sohn lines. The firm introduced further iterations of their candle holder collections each spring season, figure 3.16.<sup>39</sup> While these items are somewhat wanting as compelling design they surely proved moneymakers for the company at their low price.<sup>40</sup> Tortoiseshell and floral

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<sup>35</sup> This section refers to Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 58, no. 7 (July 1962): 19-30.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

<sup>37</sup> This chafing dish was featured on the dust jacket illustration of Marie Roberson Hamm, *The Second Chafing Dish Cookbook* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963).

<sup>38</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 58, no. 7 (July 1962): 30.

<sup>39</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 59, no. 2 (February 1963): 125 and Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 60, no. 2 (February 1964): 103.

<sup>40</sup> These candle holders were advertised extensively by major stores across the country.

designs on vinyl and metal were inserted into ranges of smoking items and serving ware as decorative motifs.<sup>41</sup> Enameled plaques on wood in various designs were used to create decorative clocks.<sup>42</sup> Sohn responded to the growing interest in gourmet cooking, especially fondue, by introducing fondue pots into his range of metal items available in copper, stainless steel and brass, figure 3.17.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps most captivating amongst the firm's offerings were the ceramic buffet collections that were an important focus of each year's introductions. At the 1963 winter shows Ernest Sohn Creations introduced *Esquire*, which was advertised by the firm in January of that year, figure 3.18.<sup>44</sup> In *Esquire* Sohn returned to the simplicity and utility that he as a designer found ideal. The collection included the full range of usual serving items, figure 3.19, all with textured matte black glaze on the outside accented by a simple band of incised lines and clean white glazed covers and interiors. Most of the pieces had an oval cross-section not far removed from rectangular geometry. As was typical with Sohn buffet items, many pieces were available with metal warming stands. *Esquire* found appeal with buyers and was retailed at leading stores such as Marshall Field's in

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<sup>41</sup> For the *Tortoise Shell* collection see, Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 59, no. 8 (August 1963): 127. For the *Floral* collection see *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, "Product Parade of 225," 60, no. 2 (February 1964): 130.

<sup>42</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 60, no. 8 (August 1964): 151.

<sup>43</sup> See Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 60, no. 7 (July 1964): 35. Sohn had introduced fondue pots earlier in his career, for example in the offerings of the *Butter Mould Line*. Sohn's chafing dishes (from *Wittcrosse* on) could also have accommodated fondue cookery. However, it was in 1963 and 1964 that the firm made a specific promotion of metal fondue ware.

<sup>44</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gift and Art Buyer* 59, no. 1 (January 1963): 53. It is not absolutely clear that the *Esquire* title only applies to the buffet service, it may have also been used to designate the tableware also advertised here.

Chicago and Macy's in New York.<sup>45</sup> In a June 1963 Macy's advertisement appealing to the bridal market, Sohn's *Esquire* collection was included in a grouping of "thrifty, exciting conveniences for your new homes."<sup>46</sup> Macy's boasted this "contemporary design oven-to-table china created by Ernest Sohn" was guaranteed to provide "service with style."<sup>47</sup> The tableware also advertised by Jack Orenstein Associates in January (figure 3.18) was a first for Sohn who had previously only created mugs and cup and saucer sets that would coordinate with his buffet lines.<sup>48</sup> No further information has come to light about this line but its wide gold banding may have inspired the following year's buffet collection.

In 1964 the firm introduced the *Empire Group* which it advertised in July, figure 3.20.<sup>49</sup> *Empire* marked the final introduction of a coordinated ceramic buffet collection in an original and modern style by the firm.<sup>50</sup> The line's name obviously hearkened back to the luxury of early nineteenth-century porcelains. However, outside of the matte gold banding at the top of pieces and around finials, *Empire* shared little in common with the detailed neoclassicism of that period. Sohn had created in *Empire* another group of elegant simple forms, many oval in cross-section like those of *Esquire*, with ribbon handles forming precise triangles angled away from the bodies and topped by simple

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<sup>45</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 1963, K11 and Macy's, Advertisement, *New York Times*, June 2, 1963, 108.

<sup>46</sup> Macy's, Advertisement, *New York Times*, June 2, 1963, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> This is the only time Sohn created tableware of this sort to the author's knowledge.

<sup>49</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 60, no. 7 (July 1964): 34.

<sup>50</sup> After this the firm introduced few other new ceramic collections and those that were released often recycled existing forms or were based on historical or traditional models. A reason for this might have been the increasing cost of creating new ceramic shapes in terms of mold making and other considerations.

spherical finials, figure 3.21.<sup>51</sup> The *Empire* group was not accompanied by the metal warming stands usually retailed with most of Sohn's ceramic buffet accessories.<sup>52</sup> *Empire* proved to be popular, possibly because its simple forms and gold banding recall the white china with gold decoration widely known as "Wedding Ring," a perennial favorite of Americans since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> One advertisement for *Empire*, by the Broadway department stores in Los Angeles, figure 3.22, noted the pieces, "moonlight white, elegantly accented with a lustrous gold band," were "A gracious signature for the knowledgeable hostess."<sup>54</sup> The store seems to have been appealing to a customer who was modern yet somewhat conservative.

The latter half of the 1960s brought an increasing focus on decorative patterns and the historical by Ernest Sohn Creations which reflected a general movement toward this aesthetic in the industry and presumably the country as a whole. The firm introduced collections that were even more blatantly historically based. In January 1965 Jack Orenstein Associates advertised *Early American*, figure 3.23.<sup>55</sup> Here turned wood detailing and patterned inserts have transformed existing Sohn products like *Tulip-Lites*,

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<sup>51</sup> Pieces with oval cross-sections included the coffee pot, creamer and sugar, soup tureen, and some casseroles. Other pieces had round cross-sections, most notably casserole dishes in various sizes.

<sup>52</sup> The author has not discovered any metal warming stands in advertisements, trade features or in the secondary market. However a metal ladle was sold with the soup tureen and the samovar had the typical metal and wood spigot. The author has examined two examples of the *Empire* soup tureen in a private collection, both of which were accompanied by Sohn metal ladles.

<sup>53</sup> The popularity of *Empire* is confirmed by its regular appearance in the secondary market as noted by this author. The "wedding ring pattern" was retailed by many firms starting with the mid nineteenth century French and German manufacturers.

<sup>54</sup> Broadway Stores, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1966, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 61, no. 1 (January 1965): 33.

trays, ice buckets and a serving cart into something that would appeal to a buyer craving a connection to America's past. A similar, if even more blatantly specific collection appeared the following season and was advertised in July 1966, figure 3.24.<sup>56</sup> In this *Pennsylvania Pewter* collection Sohn utilized traditional rimmed plate forms, turned wood and other conventional shapes and emphasized the connection to a colonial past by literally imprinting them with the year 1789. Other firm offerings were decorative although less historically connected, such as those advertised by the firm in January 1966, figure 3.25.<sup>57</sup> The swirling floral on the canister set and the hounds-tooth check of the magazine holder, umbrella stand and wastebasket made these offerings stand out.

Simple, unornamented designs also continued to be offered by Ernest Sohn Creations in the many cooking and serving items the firm produced to appeal to the strong gourmet market of the time. In 1965 the firm introduced collections that utilized teak and marble, new materials for Sohn and ones that would be a mainstay for several years. In July they advertised some of these offerings, figure 3.26.<sup>58</sup> The elegant shapes visible in the bottom half of the advertisement show Sohn returning to his love of the simple and utilitarian where the material itself provides the only decoration. Another collection introduced that year was *Flameware*, which the firm featured in a full-page advertisement in December 1965, figure 3.27.<sup>59</sup> In a sense this was a reintroduction since most of the shapes, stands, and copper covers were very little changed from one of

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<sup>56</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 62, no. 7 (July 1966): 43.

<sup>57</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 62, no. 1 (January 1966): 28.

<sup>58</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 61, no. 7 (July 1965): 36.

<sup>59</sup> Jack Orenstein Associates, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 61, no. 12 (December 1965): 25.

Sohn's original buffet serving lines, *Copper and Color*. The coffee pot, a stock item at Hall China, and the turned detailing of the wood handles made this collection slightly more conservative than its predecessor.<sup>60</sup>

Nineteen-sixty-seven marked a significant year for the gift industry and a year of change for Ernest Sohn's business. In July of that year the leading trade publication *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* reported that the gift industry had reached a volume of two billion dollars annually, doubling the milestone of one billion achieved a decade before.<sup>61</sup> As this volume indicates, the gift industry had truly become big business. The value and sales potential of gift and tableware companies was increasingly recognized by the larger business community. The late 1960s was marked by larger companies, often from historically unrelated industries, purchasing smaller gift firms. Ernest Sohn Creations and Jack Orenstein Associates entered into just such an arrangement in early 1967 when their firm merged with Liquidonics Industries of Westbury, New York.<sup>62</sup> Liquidonics was primarily a successful maker of hydraulic and telecommunications equipment and was building future profitability by acquiring other businesses under its corporate frame.<sup>63</sup> Trade accounts indicated that Sohn and Orenstein's business would "operate as the consumer products division of Liquidonics."<sup>64</sup> While this merger did bring a windfall

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<sup>60</sup> Ernest Sohn indicated that he had not designed the coffee pot shape in *Flameware* in an interview with the author on October 18, 2005, this was a traditional shape already produced by Hall.

<sup>61</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, "Today's Retailer: A Statistical Profile," 63, no. 5 (May 1967): 39.

<sup>62</sup> See *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, "Orenstein, Sohn Merge With Liquidonics," 63, no. 3 (March 1967): 13.

<sup>63</sup> See Terry Robards, "Market Place: Limelight Now on Liquidonics," *New York Times*, August 25, 1967, 52.

<sup>64</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, "Orenstein, Sohn Merge With Liquidonics," 63, no. 3 (March 1967): 13.

of capital to Sohn and his partners it did not seem to greatly change the business since the trade account also noted: "There will be no changes in management, sales policies and other operating policies within the Orenstein-Sohn division...."<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps the most significant public change for the firm after its merger with Liquidonics was a change of name. An August 1967 advertisement for the firm noted that Etc Industries, Inc., was the successor to Jack Orenstein Associates, figure 3.28.<sup>66</sup> The range of decorative and useful accessories presented in this promotion for "New Designs for Fall" was not a departure from previous work, however. These items ran the gamut of Sohn's offerings—wood and enamel, traditional clocks, barware, marble, etc. The following season the firm introduced a colorful collection of "informal party-serving-ware in the gayest, most dazzling colors ever!" as a January 1968 advertisement proclaimed, figure 3.29.<sup>67</sup> The use of full-color in the firm's advertisement was new but this appeal to the flower-power generation with selections in "Slicker Yellow, Patio Orange, Hot Pink and Chlorophyll Green" offered items that were familiar. Ernest Sohn had reused serving items and forms that had long been in the firm's catalogue and combined them with fresh colors and a new pattern for items that would "stand up remarkably well to the stress and strain of teen-age parties."<sup>68</sup> The finials and handles are particularly easy to recognize from previous incarnations. The use of plastics as seen

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Etc Industries, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 63, no. 8 (August 1967): 133.

<sup>67</sup> Etc Industries, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 69, no. 1 (January 1968): 125-126. A note about the volume number: For an unknown reason the journal skipped from volume 63 for 1967 to volume 69 for 1968.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

here became more common for the firm in the latter half of the 1960s, likely because this material had become much easier and less expensive to manufacture.

More sober groupings of items continued to be offered by Etco Industries as well. Sohn presented a variety of serving items in teak in a July 1969 advertisement, figure 3.30.<sup>69</sup> The beautiful graining of this wood, alone or combined with glass, plastic or metal, continued to be a mainstay of the firm's offerings as we see here. Sohn's affection for combining materials to create interest and eye appeal also continued during this period as we can see in a fondue pot first noted in the trade the same month.<sup>70</sup> These fondue sets combined "Nucerite" which *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* noted was "a special ceramic fused to a stainless base."<sup>71</sup> In the Nucerite fondues, figure 3.31, we see Sohn play with the colorful ceramic enamel available in red, green, blue or yellow contrasted against the deep graining of the teak base and the shiny stainless steel frame.

Ernest Sohn designs continued to be retailed by leading stores across the country in the late 1960s. Two representative advertisements for Sohn designs, by leading Midwestern retailer Marshall Field and Company, can be seen in figure 3.32 and 3.33.<sup>72</sup> In the first, figure 3.32, which appeared in October 1968, Field's highlighted "combinations of white marble, gleaming chrome and teakwood, richly hued."<sup>73</sup> The range of accessories pictured would be "Gay as bright accents on your table—delightful

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<sup>69</sup> Etco Industries, Advertisement, *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 70, no. 7 (July 1969): 50.

<sup>70</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* "Merchandise Highlights," 70, no. 7 (July 1969): 94-95.

<sup>71</sup> *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* "Merchandise Highlights," 70, no. 9 (September 1969): 73.

<sup>72</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 1968, A1 and Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, April 8, 1969, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 1968, A1.

as gift ideas” according to the retailer.<sup>74</sup> The second advertisement which appeared in April 1969 featured a grouping of “Color-Happy Buffetware” similar to that advertised by Etco the previous year.<sup>75</sup> Attempting to appeal to a younger, more hip consumer, Marshall Field’s noted that these serving items in “Bold lemon yellow and zesty lime green...swing out in accents of smartly grained walnut and ceramic tile.”<sup>76</sup> They would allow the buyer to “Put on a happy new look for your spring and summer entertaining...”<sup>77</sup>

The final chapter in Ernest Sohn’s career dawned in 1970. Mergers and consolidations within the gift and household accessories industry became increasingly commonplace at the end of the 1960s. Phyllis Sweed, the editor of *Gifts and Decorative Accessories*, called them “a sign of the times” in a February 1969 editorial.<sup>78</sup> In this article Sweed highlighted “the concept of total selling” as a reason behind all of these mergers.<sup>79</sup> She elaborated on the trend: “Firms are acquiring other companies that can round out their product mix...so that they can sell a total look.”<sup>80</sup> Sweed noted that many in the industry might mourn the passing of “honored firms into the melting pot of the giant corporation” but the potential for streamlining of manufacturing and merchandising

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Marshall Field and Company, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, April 8, 1969, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Phyllis Sweed, “Editorial: All Together Now,” *Gifts and Decorative Accessories* 70, no. 2 (February 1969): 27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Ellipsis original to text.

