

By Gretchen Gscheidle

Gretchen Gscheidle is a product researcher at Herman Miller. Like Bill Stumpf she earned a BFA in industrial design from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Their first collaboration was during the development of the Aeron™ chair when Gretchen interned with Herman Miller's Product Research Group.

1936 – 2006

BILL STUMPF, IDSA

More than a few times since Bill Stumpf died on August 30, 2006, current events have caused several of us at Herman Miller to ponder, “I wonder what Bill would have to say about that.” His insight was as deep and broad as the remarkable legacy of his designs that continue to be produced and in the generations of designers he influenced.

It's painful to write about Bill Stumpf in the past tense. Walk the production floor at Herman Miller's GreenHouse in Holland, MI, where his chair designs—Ergon®, Equa® and Aeron® (the latter two designed with Don Chadwick)—are built on side-by-side assembly lines. Or drive a few miles over to the company's Design Yard, where Bill's bespectacled visage—captured at various times during his 36-year association with Herman Miller—beams at you throughout the facility. In those places, where he did such wonderful work for such a long time, you half expect to look up and see him walking through the front door.



Photo: Brad Trent

Bill with versions of the Aeron chair.

Bill might have been grouching about the flight from Minneapolis and the sorry state of modern air travel as he came through those doors, but once he landed at the Design Yard he was truly at home. Along with the Stumpf-Weber office in Minneapolis and his home studio, the Design Yard functioned as a playground for him. Lining the back hallways, out of the public view, were his playmates—the engineers, model makers and researchers. In his 1998 book, *The Ice Palace That Melted Away*, Bill paid tribute to retired model maker Pep Nagelkirk in the acknowledgments; that's how much Bill adored Pep.

STUMPF



Left to right: Bill and a colleague working on the Equa shell with a Kevi base in the Winona studio. ■ Bill with the Equa chair. ■ Bill and a colleague confer.

When Bill came to the Design Yard, he was there to play—in the purest, happiest sense of the word. With his sleeves rolled up and his mind engaged, working on development projects was fun. But it was also physically and mentally demanding. A few years ago, he half-jokingly and rhetorically asked why, at his age, he was putting himself through that process. Bill answered himself with gusto: “Because I love it.”

During the development of the Aeron chair, the first iterations of Pellicle®, the innovative mesh-like suspension material that formed the chair’s seat and back, put a smile on Bill’s face—as did the pressure-sensitive mats that measured the distribution of pressure across the seat and backrest as a person sat in the chair. At such moments, Bill was visibly content: another problem solved, another question answered.

And yet it was always merely a marker along an endless journey, for there were more questions formulating in his head immediately behind that one. Bill Stumpf was ferociously curious. He read everything. Newspapers, novels, journal articles and biographies on a limitless range of topics were all part of Bill’s daily regimen—something that Herman Miller founder D.J. DePree had advised him to do long ago. Bill in turn shared with us his enthusiasm about the things he had read and learned. Frequently, Bill would send a cryptic

message: “Did you happen to read the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* yesterday?” or “I found a book worth reading,” followed by the title. In that sense, although he was a “designer,” Bill also was a researcher and teacher to all of us.

What Bill couldn’t gain from reading, he sought through coaching from the most learned people available. He cultivated the most accomplished professionals in specialized fields like orthopedic surgery and even an hourly intern charged with analyzing data tied to one of his projects—if you knew more than he did, Bill gave you his undivided attention. I know, because I once was one of those interns.

In the final year of his life, Bill wrote that “there are no surefire rules to guarantee the work of a designer or the success of a designed product,” but during his lifetime—and beyond—he received numerous awards for his work. As recently as October he was awarded the 2006 National Design Award for product design, presented to him posthumously by the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. As iconic as his designs themselves, there were certain problem sets and topics that formed the core of Bill’s beliefs about design: civility, honesty, well-being and, what he called the arts of daily living. He thought about, spoke about and built on all of these throughout his career. He battled against design indignities, those that “denied the human spirit.”



Bill Stumpf's spirit was not to be denied. Whenever or however we heard from him, whether a telephone call, a handwritten note on personalized stationery, an e-mail or a face-to-face conversation, we could count on at least one of four inevitable ingredients: humor, curiosity, storytelling or provocation.

Bill worked with Herman Miller from 1970 until his death. During that time he made an enormous contribution to the Herman Miller community. He was a key figure in the company's transformation into a research-based, problem-solving innovator. The financial impact of his designs is measured in billions of dollars. "I work best when I'm pushed to the edge," Bill said. "When I'm at the point where my pride is subdued, where I'm an innocent again. Herman Miller knows how to push me that way, mainly because the company still believes—years after D.J. DePree first told me—that good design isn't just good business, it's a moral obligation. Now that's pressure."

At the memorial service Herman Miller held for Bill in early October, D.J.'s son Max DePree, himself a former executive in the company and Bill's longtime friend, spoke about how Bill's passing has left him considering two questions: Can a corporation love a person? And was Bill Stumpf our last giant? Max affirmed the reality of the first question. As for the second, he said, we'll just have to see. And hope. ■

BILL STUMPF, IDSA:

Legacy of a Designer/Teacher/Friend

In the natural order of this universe, children and students are expected to outlive their parents and teachers, respectively. As one of Bill Stumpf's teachers, I found the announcement of his death particularly poignant—but only for a moment. Upon graduation, Bill became a supernova amidst a galaxy of stars that graduated in industrial design over the years. Our roles as teacher and student began to morph during my retirement, leaving me the eager student and Bill the inveterate teacher—or so I rationalized to allay my utter despair.

Bill confessed to me in his last letter that he was indeed a lucky, independent man to devote most of his life to focusing on a single design problem—that of seating. His design legacy will be found not only with solutions frozen in time in museums around the world, but also in their active use in myriad offices and homes for generations to come. His words and writings, if you have had the good fortune to hear or read them, will last even longer.

Tucker Madawick, another stalwart of the design profession, passed on exactly two weeks before Bill died; and it is my belief that Tucker is in his celestial home redesigning his angel-wing powered Studebaker Starliner, sans wheels, with Bill Stumpf assisting him with the seating, with all those clouds at his disposal. Now that is truly blue-sky thinking!

—Ed Zagorski, FIDSA

TUCKER MADAWICK, FIDSA:

Remembering a Colorful Designer

As a young high-school student, I remember watching in fascination in the audience as Tucker Madawick and several other "automotive stylists" performed live, hourly demonstrations creating full-size chalk renderings of Ford automobiles on stage at the Ford Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Little did I know that seven years later us two Pratt Institute grads would be working together as part of the Lippincott design team shaping the infamous Tucker 48 post-war dream car.

During the following 60 years our design career paths crossed numerous times. Tucker always seemed to me to be full of life, projecting a gregarious nature and infectious energy toward his design projects, environment and associates. Although he was not inclined to suffer fools gladly, Madawick had a very playful side. One of our package design clients at the J. Gordon Lippincott office was the Trojan condom account. Tucker organized a competition involved inflating the condoms into rather sizeable balloons, launching them from the 55th-floor windows of our office building and seeing whose would travel the greatest distance. He always won.

During the past several years he and I found ourselves collaborating once again on diverse projects ranging from assisting a young designer in the Czech Republic in the development of a minicar for wheelchair-bound drivers, to helping provide research and historical background data to three different authors busy compiling design-related books. Tucker's eyesight may have been failing due to macular degeneration, but that contagious Madawick enthusiasm never seemed to diminish. He lived his life with gusto. Goodbye, Tuck.

—Budd Steinhilber, FIDSA



By Carroll Gantz, FIDSA

Carroll Gantz was the design head at the Hoover Co. and subsequently at Black & Decker, where he designed the original Dustbuster cordless hand-held vacuum cleaner. He was also active in IDSA at the national level from 1972 to 1985. He got to know Tucker Madawick during Tucker's leadership at IDSA, and the inspiration never ceased. In the 1990s, after both were retired, Tucker became Gantz's close friend and a valuable source of automotive information for Carroll's books on design history.

1918 – 2006

TUCKER MADAWICK, FIDSA



Photo: Judy Fleming Stephenson

It is hard to imagine someone more illustrative of the glamorous, successful industrial designer most of my generation aspired to be when we entered the profession in the mid-1900s than Tucker Madawick. His brilliant career paralleled, and colorfully illustrates, the postwar history of the design profession, when the second generation of industrial designers advanced the field from its founding pioneers of the early 1930s. Tucker knew them all and skillfully emulated their flair.

Tucker once described how it was: "As design consultants, we were the bad guys. We were intruders. All my life, all my years with Raymond Loewy, that's what we did. We went in and intruded. We were brought in by topside—not by marketing, not by the engineers, but by the top brass—brought in to shake 'em up, wake 'em up and enhance the sales. That's what it was all about—market penetration."

Tucker was a designer's designer, highly talented on the board, as his precise and dramatic renderings attest, but he was also an astute consultant and corporate executive. Beyond his incredible career achievements, he was the most personable and engaging designer I've ever known. His boundless and dynamic vitality inspired all he met to contribute their best and most creative design efforts with enthusiasm and dedication.

Born in New York City, Tucker attended Brooklyn Technical High School and the Art Students League. He was in the first graduating class for industrial design at Pratt Institute in 1938, where he studied under industrial design education pioneers Alexander Kostellow, Donald Dohner and J. Gordon Lippincott.

Tucker joined the Ford Motor Co. in Detroit after graduation. For the 1939 World's Fair he prepared full-size pastel renderings for the current Ford, Mercury and Lincoln-Zephyr Continental models. In 1942 he joined Ford's aircraft team at the Willow Run plant in Michigan as a production coordinator for Convair's World War II B-24, B-32 and B-36 bomber programs.



Left to right: After joining Raymond Loewy Associates in 1947, Madawick was selected to establish Loewy's new London office and joined the Loewy team working on the 1953 Studebaker Starliner. ■ Madawick was involved with the design of the ill-fated Tucker 48 car introduced by Preston Tucker as the "Car of Tomorrow," along with a team that included Budd Steinhilber, FIDSA, and Read Viemeister, FIDSA.

In 1946 Tucker joined the New York firm of Lippincott & Margulies (L&M), headed by his former teacher at Pratt, Gordon Lippincott. Soon, Tucker was involved, along with an L&M team that included Hal Bergstrom, Philip Egan, Budd Steinhilber, FIDSA, and independent designer Read Viemeister, FIDSA, with the design of the doomed Tucker 48 car, promoted as the "Car of Tomorrow." The endeavor was ill-fated because its entrepreneurial spirit, Preston Tucker, was indicted by the SEC for regulatory violations. Production halted after only 51 cars were made.

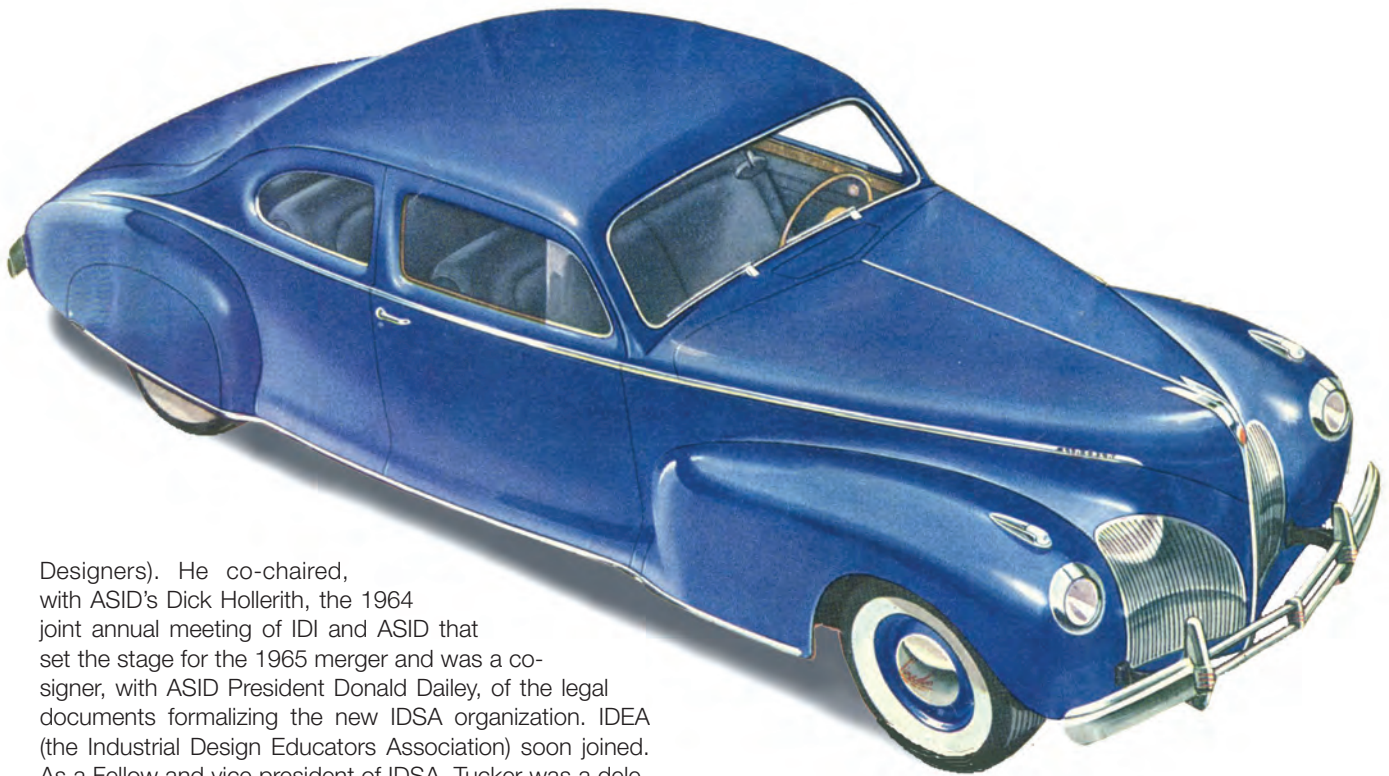
Tucker joined Raymond Loewy Associates in 1947 and was sent, with Carl Otto, to reopen and manage Loewy's London office, which had closed during the war. The accounts included Electrolux, Gestetner and the Rootes Group. Tucker handled the Austin car account until the company closed, then returned to Loewy's New York office as an account executive for Coca Cola, Sealtest, Frigidaire and Shell before being assigned to Loewy's team in South Bend, IN, to work on the Studebaker account.

Carl Otto left Loewy in 1951 to open his own company with offices in New York, London and Stockholm. Tucker joined Otto's firm in 1952 as his "automobile man" for the Standard-Triumph Motor Co. account. When Otto's firm folded, Tucker returned to South Bend in 1954 to join Loewy's Studebaker team, headed by Robert Bourke. The team was working on the Studebaker Starliner coupe, which won international design awards and established Studebaker as a style leader. The Museum of Modern Art later called this "Loewy Coupe" a "work of art," which it was. But I'm sure Tucker's most treasured memory of this assignment, however, was meeting his attractive future wife Patti.

Recommended by industrial design legend John Vassos, who established RCA's first internal design department in 1933, Tucker joined RCA in Indianapolis in 1959 as manager of radio, phonograph, tape and television design. Along with managing a staff of 60, he organized an advanced design panel of consultants in architecture, anthropology, interior design and market research. The panel advised on the design of futuristic RCA electronic products, designed in RCA's Advanced Design Center under Tucker, and unveiled in 1961 as "Sets of the Seventies." These included pocket-sized TV receivers, slimmer CRT tubes, "Hear-See" TV tape-cartridges, lap-top viewing and a large-screen TV that received pictures from a satellite. While technologically unachievable at the time, these innovative concepts eventually appeared in retail stores everywhere.

Tucker became vice president of industrial design in RCA's Advance Design Center in 1968, and in 1971, divisional vice president for industrial design of RCA Consumer Electronics until his retirement in 1980. His infectious enthusiasm and personality influenced a generation of employees and business contacts at RCA, and his departure was an event in which many celebrated his accomplishments and wished him the best in the future.

During his illustrious career, Tucker was a proactive leader in organized design, starting in 1954 as a charter member of the Southern New England Chapter of the Industrial Designers Institute (IDI). He held sequential offices, local and national, including chair of IDI's national awards program in 1961–1962, before he became president and a Fellow of IDI in 1964. He was also a key player in the historic merger of IDI and ASID (American Society of Industrial



Rendering of the 1940 Lincoln.

Designers). He co-chaired, with ASID's Dick Hollerith, the 1964 joint annual meeting of IDI and ASID that set the stage for the 1965 merger and was a co-signer, with ASID President Donald Dailey, of the legal documents formalizing the new IDSA organization. IDEA (the Industrial Design Educators Association) soon joined. As a Fellow and vice president of IDSA, Tucker was a delegate to Icid congresses in 1965 (Vienna), 1967 (Ottawa and Montreal), 1969 (London) and 1971 (Ibiza, Spain). Tucker became IDSA president in 1969–1970.

That period was most difficult for IDSA. With the Vietnam War, assassinations, the civil rights movement and social change, the 1960s caused unrest among young designers. Many began to view IDSA as an exclusive, closed club of older designers representing capitalistic business interests, rather than one trying to solve the then-obvious social and environmental problems. This was primarily a generational movement, and many young designers felt IDSA needed to change drastically. Many challenged IDSA's credibility in hostile debates at annual meetings.

During his term as IDSA president, Tucker responded to this challenge by authorizing a special task force study group chaired by Dick Latham in Chicago. Its purpose: to engage many young and older designers in a thorough review of IDSA in the context of social, industrial and economic change. The result, developed during three all-day meetings and led by a professional moderator, was a comprehensive report identifying organizational steps IDSA should take to meet the expectations of young designers and adapt to cultural changes. However, hampered by financial problems, the relocation of the headquarters from New York to Washington, DC, and internal resistance, subsequent IDSA administrations were slow to respond. Not until the late 1970s did IDSA begin to make significant changes in its organizational structure and rigid membership requirements to attract younger members. Also during Tucker's term as president, the first IDSA professional publication, *Design Journal*, was launched, which continues today as *Innovation*.

After his retirement to Ft. Myers, FL, Tucker remained as active and engaged as ever. He sailed the Gulf Coast in his Hunter 32 sailboat, *Dos Amigos II*, with his wife Pat and

friends, including his talented successor at RCA, Dave Tompkins, FIDSA. Ever the leader, Tucker was soon elected commodore of the Landings Yacht Club.

However, his love continued to be automobiles, especially sports cars. He amassed a large collection of automotive artifacts and memorabilia. As an automotive historian, he lectured and wrote on classic cars and their designers and served as a knowledgeable and fascinating docent at the Collier Automotive Museum in Naples, FL. A member of many auto organizations, he became a personality attraction at meetings of Lincoln Continental enthusiasts. He loved that design so much that drawings of the car graced his personal stationery.

He also collaborated in the writing of numerous articles and books about classic cars and historic designers he knew, such as Robert Bourke and Raymond Loewy.

Tucker was delighted to provide photos and design information for my 2005 book on design history, *Design Chronicles*. Over the last few years he was my frequent source of verbal inspiration and information for my new book on automotive history, *Car Art*, to be published in 2007.

Tucker's recent passing was mourned by the entire design community. He was remembered in a special tribute at IDSA's 2006 annual conference in Austin, TX. In a 1993 interview, Tucker summed up his life simply: "I've had some successes and a few failures, but it's the many people I've touched that's important. I've had a wonderful and challenging life. You can't ask for more than that." But his life and extraordinary career will remain an inspiration to designers for many years to come. To those of us who were fortunate enough to know Tucker Madawick, he will remain in our memories as a most honored and gifted friend and colleague. ■