

# A Group of Designs by Gustav Jensen

**H**IGH-RANKING in the roll-call of New York's industrial designers is a six-foot Dane with the voice of a Viking. Gustav Jensen is an artist, whether he is talking, eating, or performing Herculean labors in cleaning out the Plebeian Stables. The creed of the industrial designer is that every implement of modern life can be made into a work of art. Jensen has pursued this creed to fabulous extremes. He has designed kitchen sinks that have been exhibited in museums; his hot water boilers have been compared to Renaissance caskets, and he meditates for months before he designs a doorknob. Pure functionalists among the industrial designers don't give him the full stamp of approval; he has an unfortunate love for the classical, they say. Sometimes he crowns a perfect collaboration of simple lines with a strange, flowerlike curlicue that is his hallmark. But he never loses his profound simplicity, and there lies the keynote of his classicism, whether the "pure" functionalists approve or not. He is obsessed with the art of China, India, and Greece, but he is a strict modernist. These mixed strains in him have produced some of the most striking work being done in America today. On the following pages are samples of the improvements Jensen has wrought in a world that little heeded the handiwork of industrial designers until a few years ago.



**Coronet**  
March, 1940  
p. 117

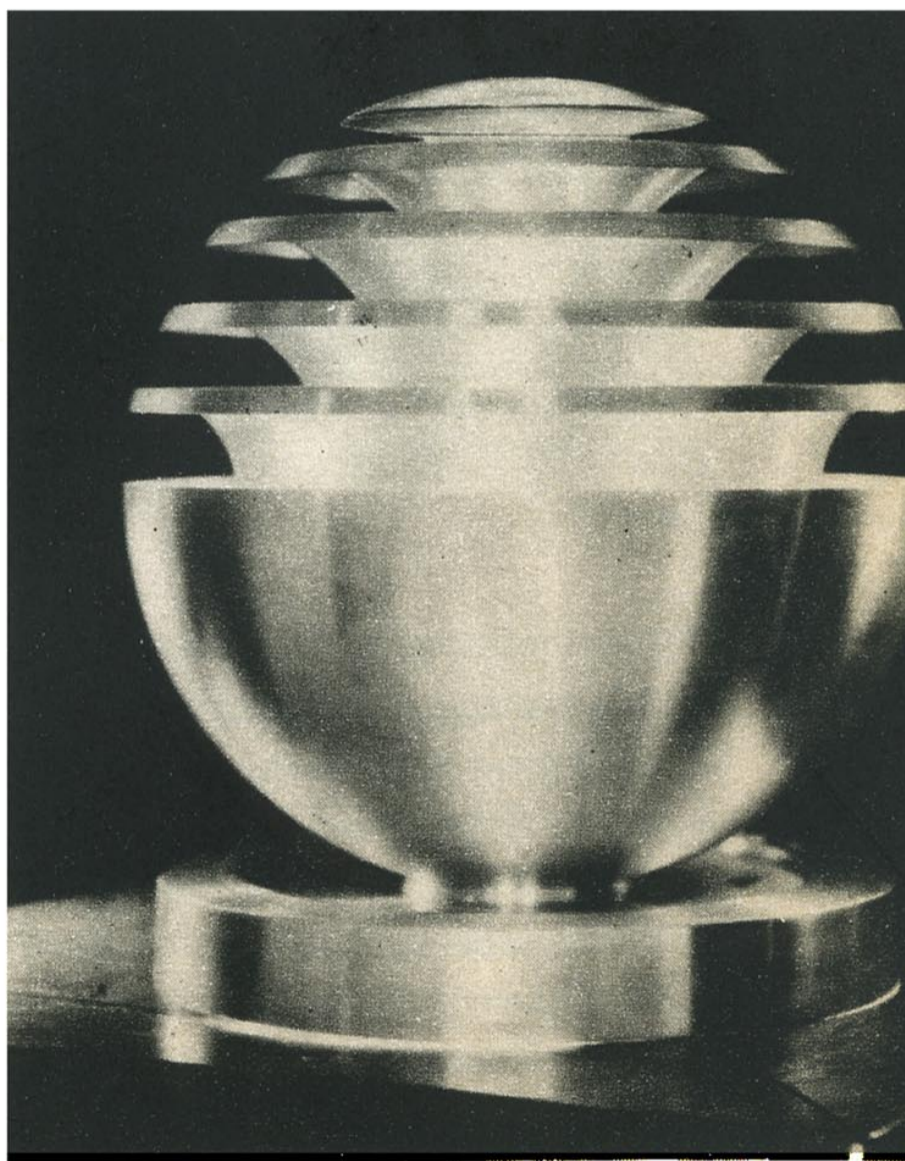
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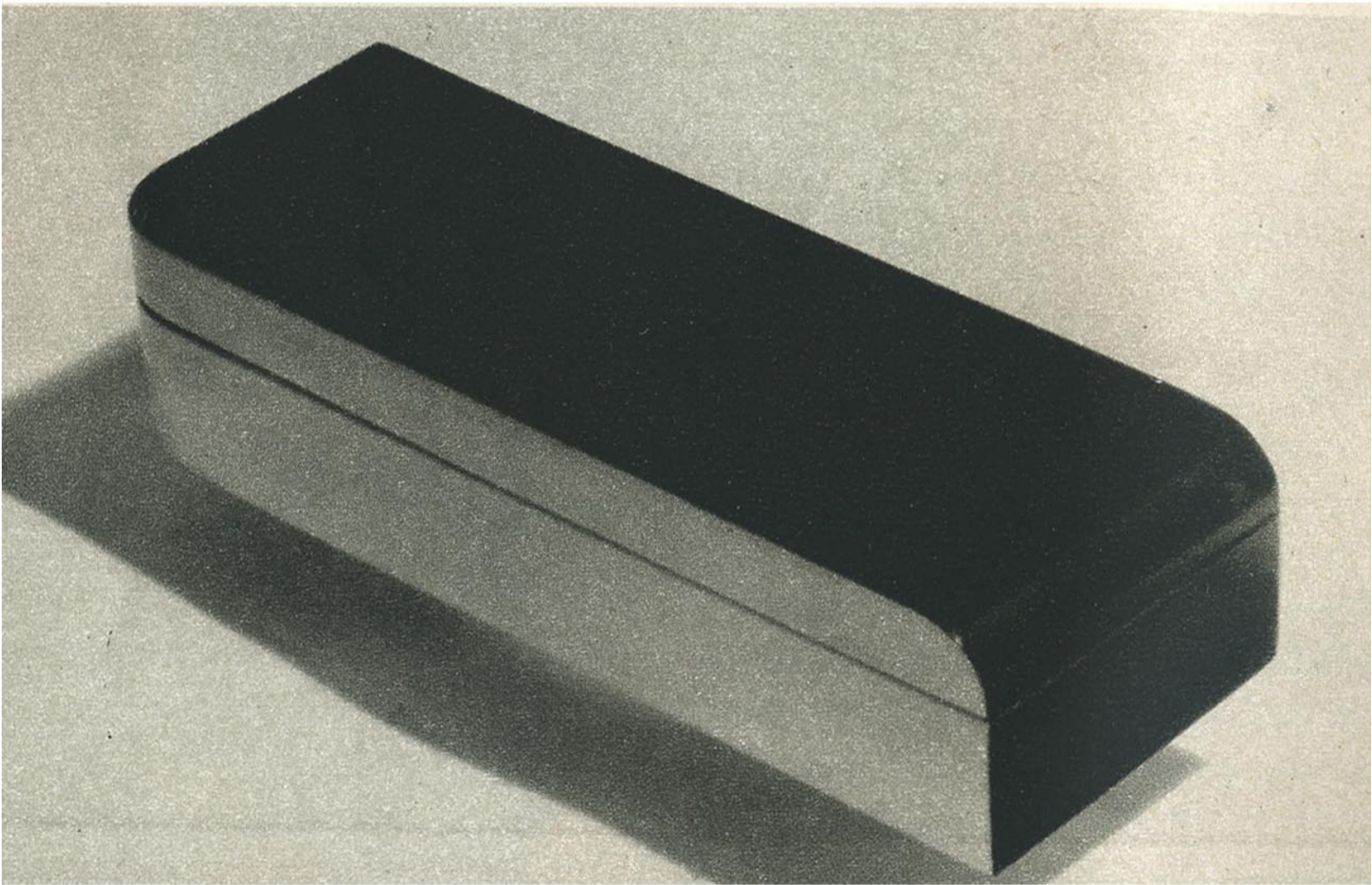
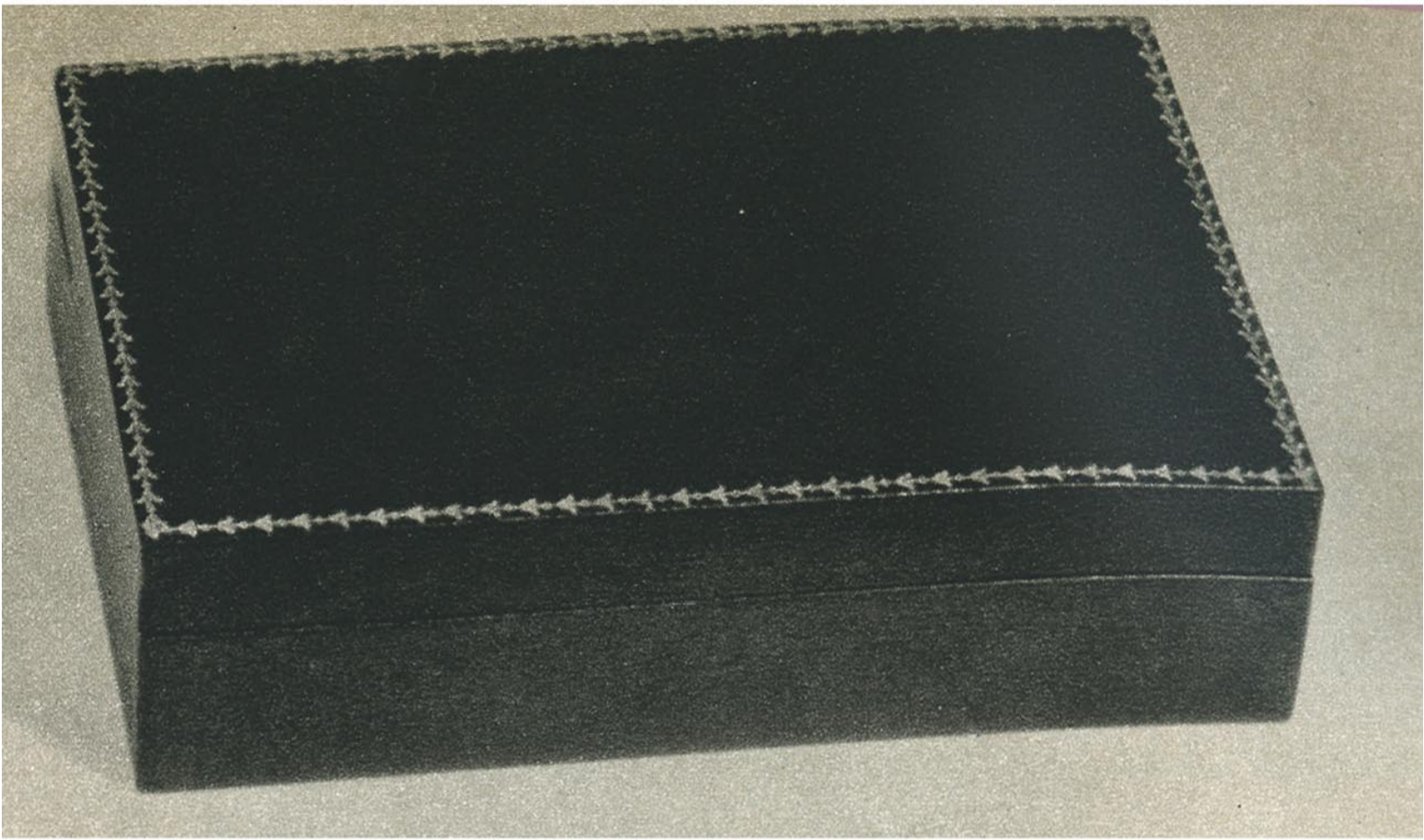
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Some day, when the unseen millions of the radio audience come to realize that the radio in the upper picture has no relationship in form to the sounds that come out of it, we may see our homes graced by the radio in the picture below. This is Gustav Jensen's radio. In Jensen's own words: "Radio is a miracle. It should look like a miracle." To obtain his effect he has used a simple sphere to house the main mechanism of the machine. The upper half of the sphere has been sliced into the form you see here. From the openwork of this upper half comes the voice of the radio, as well as a changing, convoluting light. The base of this radio, the disc, is the tuning dial.



GERLACH

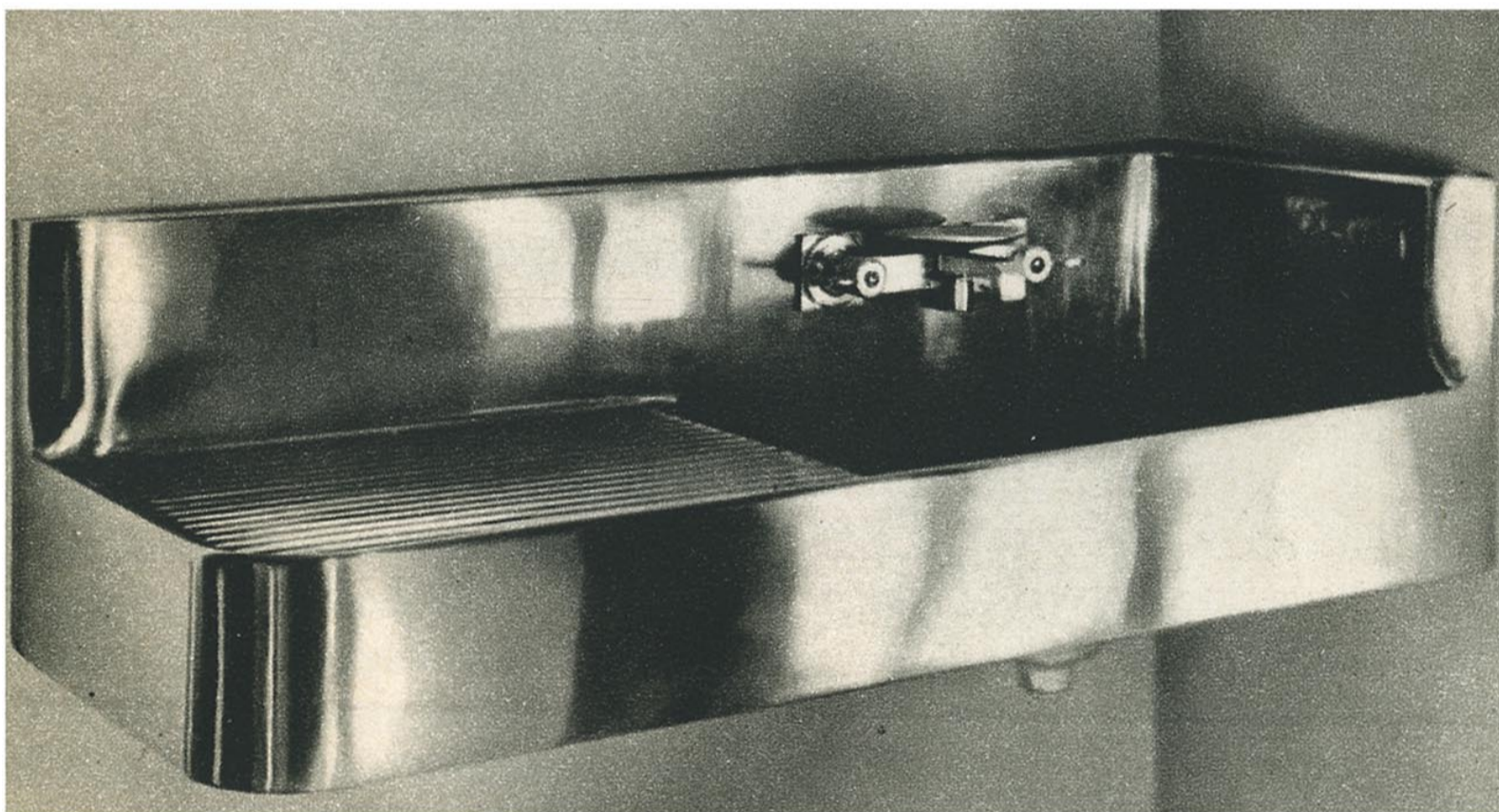
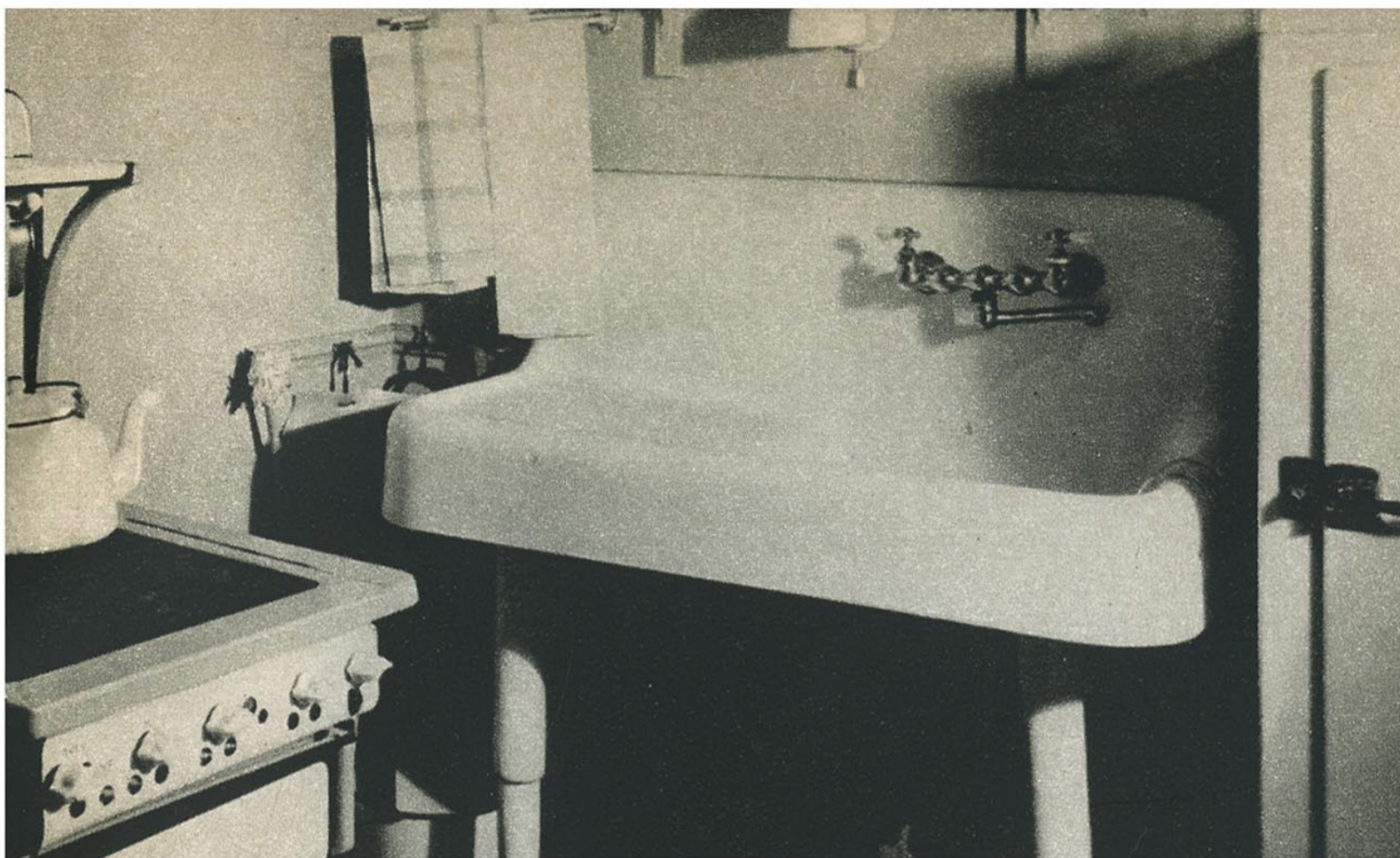




The lowly box form is one of the designer's most complicated problems. At the top is the form with which we are most familiar. Below is the most celebrated of Jensen designs, a box with two of its square corners rounded off. This seemingly simple accomplishment created a revolution in industrial design. It is certainly the most

popular shape ever devised for the small radio. It has been successfully applied to clocks, furniture, buildings, ice-boxes, cabinets, packages—in fact, to everything which takes a square or rectangular shape. Its main purpose in terms of line is this: its line runs all around the shape and is not abruptly broken off at the corners.





GERLACH

Art in the kitchen, says the industrial designer, could be an immense power for good. Our esthetics, as well as our gastronomics, would be vastly improved if housewives worked in the right surroundings. At top is the sort of sink that most housewives have to contend with. Below is the job that Jensen performed for International Nickel Com-

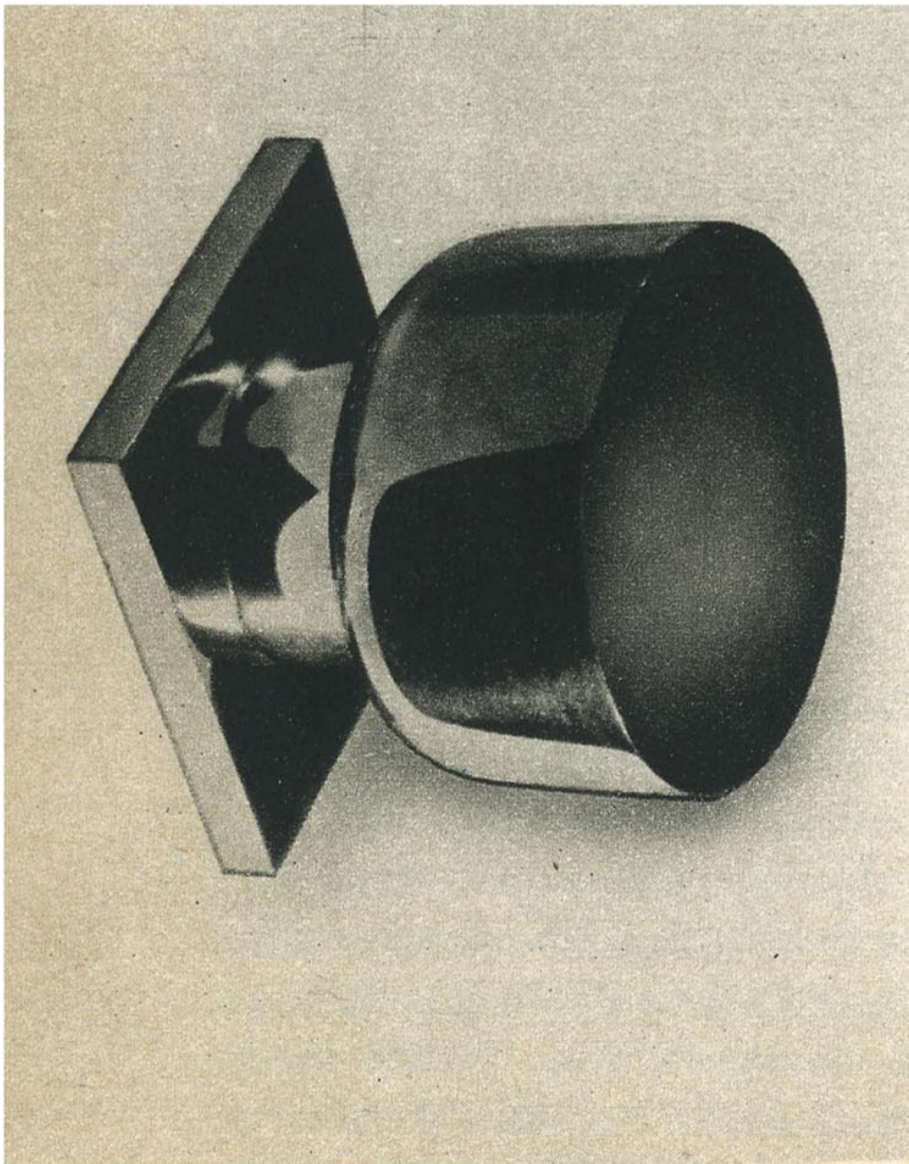
pany. It is made of Monel Metal and represented a brand new form when Jensen created it, though since copied in countless versions. Simplicity is its main objective, attained through a constantly flowing line. The same straight and curved lines are found on the large areas as are found on the more concentrated mechanism of the faucets.

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REHNQUIST

Not even the doorknob has escaped the crusading eye of the designer. He finds that the most ordinary taken-for-granted objects present him with the most perplexing problems. The average doorknob (above) has presented a perpetual challenge to the trade. Below is Jensen's solution of the problem. Though it boasts such a modern appearance, it is actually a reversion to first principles—the combination of line and curve. Notice how well the two balance each other here. This doorknob presents a more comfortable grip to the fist than the other knob. Though it appears almost flat here, the top surface of the Jensen knob is actually convex, integrating handsomely with the rest of the curved surfaces.





DISRAELI

Milady's hand mirror is one of the most ancient forms of art. In the upper photo you see how the silversmiths of the turn of this century gratified the female's desire to look at herself. Below you find not an ancient Greek form but a modern Jensen design. He has applied here the same principles applied to the doorknob—the delicate balance between square and circle. It has been said that this mirror might be two thousand years old, it might be the work of a designer yet unborn. That is another way of saying that there were industrial designers in Grecian days who knew that the square and the circle are the alpha and omega of all design. They made the same sophisticated use of the two basic elements in their day.



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