1950 - 2000

TECHNOLOGY

In the 50 years from 1950 to 2000, there have been several innovations that led to fundamental changes in the way people live, which have been unprecedented in the previous centuries. The underlying ground breaking technology of electrification, which is the process of powering by electricity has been perfected in the Western societies since the late 1940s. It has been refer to as "the greatest engineering achievement of the 20th Century" by the National Academy of Engineering. Enabled by this underlying technology of electrical power, technologies and innovation in radio and television fundamentally changed how media and information are distributed.

Emergent use of plastics, along with advances in the shrinking of transistor sizes, enabled the mass production of houseware, appliances and home electronics.

Other advances in metal and composite material technology along with computing power increases have enabled the drastic innovations in heavy machinery, airplanes and automobiles. Later in the 20th century, the information technology industry was born out of the creation of the Internet and the world wide web. This along with the previously mentioned electrification has enabled innovation across almost all industries. To put shortly, the fifty years spanning 1950 to 2000 has been one of the most transformational period in human history.

MATERIALS

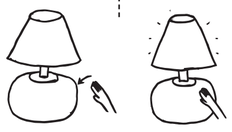
Although already present before, the concept of Lighting Design became a fully independent discipline when the International Association of Lighting Design (IALD) was found in 1969. Various materials were now being used for the optical systems to transmit and/or reflect light. The most popular ones were acrylics, polystyrene, vinyl P.V.C., polyester, glass, fiberglass, sheet steel, and aluminum. The choice of material for lightning fixtures also became even wider; sheet steel, cast iron, stainless steel, aluminum and its alloys, magnesium alloys, copper, bronze, brass were used and combined freely in the lamp designs.

Ceramics, woods, and plastics were also used for fixtures, in addition to its use in various other lamp elements. Finishes such as plastic dip coating and aluminum and zinc metal spraying were used to protect fixtures and housing from corrosion. With the growing choice of materials, designers of this era began to place more importance on the art of lamp design; focusing not only the function of the lamp, but the form as well.

INTERACTIONS

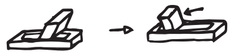
Ever since their invention, lamps have always had some sort of interaction with the user. However, in this era, designers had the freedom and creativity to try out some new forms of unique interactions. Lamps had new ways of being turned on and off - with touch panels and remotes, in addition to the classic switches, toggles, and buttons.

One of the most intriguing interactions was having a touch panel on the entirety of the lamp surface as a switch. This is an example of a capacitance switch, and works by using body capacitance.



Capacitance Switch (touch interaction)

Button

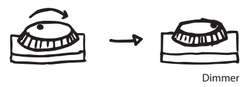


Toggle

Rotational switch

Another form of interaction typical of lamps from this era is dimming. A dimmer is an electrical component which allows the user to control the brightness of a lamp. In 1959, Joel S. Spira invented a new type of dimmer which is the basis of many dimmers in use today. Solid-state, or semiconductor dimmers, were created based off of this new invention. Essentially, they alter the voltage waveform applied to the lamp, controlling its brightness, and in the process, wasted the least amount of power compared to other dimmers.

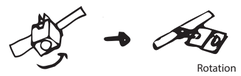
In addition to the electronic innovations in this era, other interactions typical of lamps in this era include controlling the position of the light, either by having flexible stands/housings, or swivel joints allowing rotation.



Dimmer

Bending

Pull down



Rotation

The 1950-2000 era showed great creativity and innovation in the aspect of interaction with lamps, and most of these innovations are the basis of many objects we use today.

SOCIETY

In the era of 1950-2000, the world experienced a number of social and cultural changes, mainly brought upon by war, industrialization, and advances in technology and science. In the 1950s, American companies grew large and powerful because of all the technological and scientific advances, and human labour became less in demand in favour for machinery run operations, widening the gap between the rich and poor.

American consumerism was also at one of it's highest points in history, which was partially brought upon by the integration of television into the everyday household. The television also relayed messages of conformity, the idealized "American family", and gender and racial stereotypes.

With the rise of consumerism, the automobile industry flourished and the American population experienced a substantial population growth. However, there were many that did not profit from the rise in industrialization and consumerism, most of whom were of the immigrant or native population. This is an apparent trend for this decade, in which the developed countries tend to experience great economic growth while the developing countries struggle with debt and poverty.

After the 1950s, the following decades experienced a great increase in social activism and equality for minorities of all kinds. With the leadership of many powerful and passionate leaders and the growing enthusiasm of college students, social movements such as the Women's Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Environmentalism, and Anti-War Movements took a great leap forward and gave more legal and human rights to a number of different minorities.

Finally, nearing the end of the 20th century, although social activism was still of high concern, the world begins to fully immerse itself into the technology era. The 1990s witness the emergence of the World Wide Web, Nintendo's success in the video game industry, and the growing popularity of portable music players and cellular devices, changing social dynamics all over the world.

1950s
Italian vintage desk lamp made from aluminium (hood), steel (base) and brass (stem)

1960s
Vittsjø Luxus Wall Lamp in teak and cased glass by Östen Kristiansson for Swedish Lamp Design

1960s
Vintage Kaiser Lamp in glass and steel for Kaiser Leuchten

1970s
Ceiling light in chromed steel by Staff Leuchten

1970s
Staff Ceiling Lights in aluminum by Space Age Design

1981
A "Tahiti" Lamp in Wood , laminate, meta by Ettore Sottsass for Memphis

1985
Vico MagistrettiEnameled Metal and Brass 'Idomeneo' Wall light for O-Luce

1992
Ferrucio Laviani's Orbital Floor light with five glass diffusers and an aluminium frame

1994
Sci-fi influenced Helice Floor light in aluminum by Marc Newson 1994

1998
Zettel'z 5 Chandelier 1998 by Ingo Maurer (paper, wire)

1950s
Rise of Suburbs

Late 1950s
Rise of Television and popular media

1963
Martin Luther King: "I have a dream."

1968
Intense fighting in Vietnam War

1969
Counterculture

1960s
Space competition between nations

1979
First woman to become a leader of a world power

1989
Berlin Wall Falls

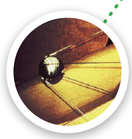
1990
Hubble Telescope entered service

1993
Middle East Peace Agreement

1996
Dolly the cloned sheep

1950

2000



1957
Launch of the Sputnik 1

1961
First color television

1969
Man lands on the moon

1970s
Rise of the Commercial Arline

1970s
Mass production of home electronics

1970s
Maturity in transistor application

1982
First laser printer

1987
First transatlantic fibre optic cable

1995
Release of Window 95

2000
Height of the "Dot-com"boom