



## Foreword by Victoria Matranga

Alfonso Iannelli's remarkable career, in Chicago from 1914 to 1965, spanned the Arts & Crafts and Prairie School movements to the *Mad Men* mid-century modern era and connected architecture, graphics, industrial design, and education. Working in the field then known as "commercial art" or "applied art," Iannelli aimed to infuse buildings, products, and advertising with a unified visual integrity in order to surround, inspire, and enlighten everyday life.

His name is known to art and architecture aficionados for his sculpture that adorned churches and commercial buildings. Though his work has been linked in the public imagination with Frank Lloyd Wright because of his single collaboration with the famed architect in the short-lived 1914 Midway Gardens complex, his most public and enduring contribution to Chicago's built environment is his sculpted Rock of Gibraltar on the façade of the 1955 Prudential Building, seen daily by thousands of people. For kitchenware collectors and Art Deco enthusiasts, Iannelli is remembered for a Sunbeam electric

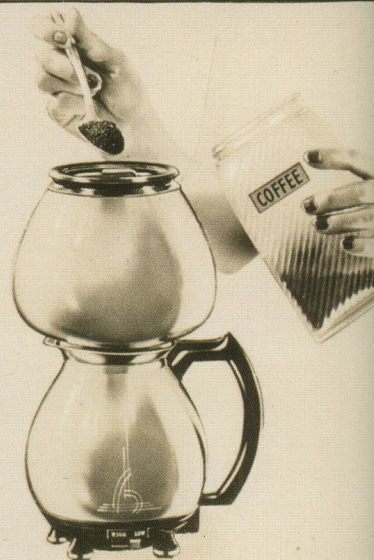
coffee maker that brewed flavorful coffee in American homes for a generation.

Thankfully, unlike many designers who discard their past work, Alfonso Iannelli kept a detailed record of his prolific activity. This archive passed through the hands of responsible caretakers who recognized its value and finally rested under the eyes of David Jameson, who devoted 20 years to studying the materials. In 2013, Jameson gave us the gift of the lavishly illustrated *Alfonso Iannelli: Modern by Design*, which presents the long-buried visual record, excerpts from Iannelli's own words, and insightful anecdotes about his career's winding path.

Iannelli entered my life in 1973, when I worked for the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation, then headquartered on Prairie Avenue at Glessner House, the 1886 masterpiece home designed by architect H.H. Richardson. The Foundation, later renamed the Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF), today is a thriving architectural education center, across

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*Photograph of Magazine advertisement for Coffeemaster, circa 1938. This ad shows the first C20 design.*





**1** All you do is put in the water and coffee, then . . .

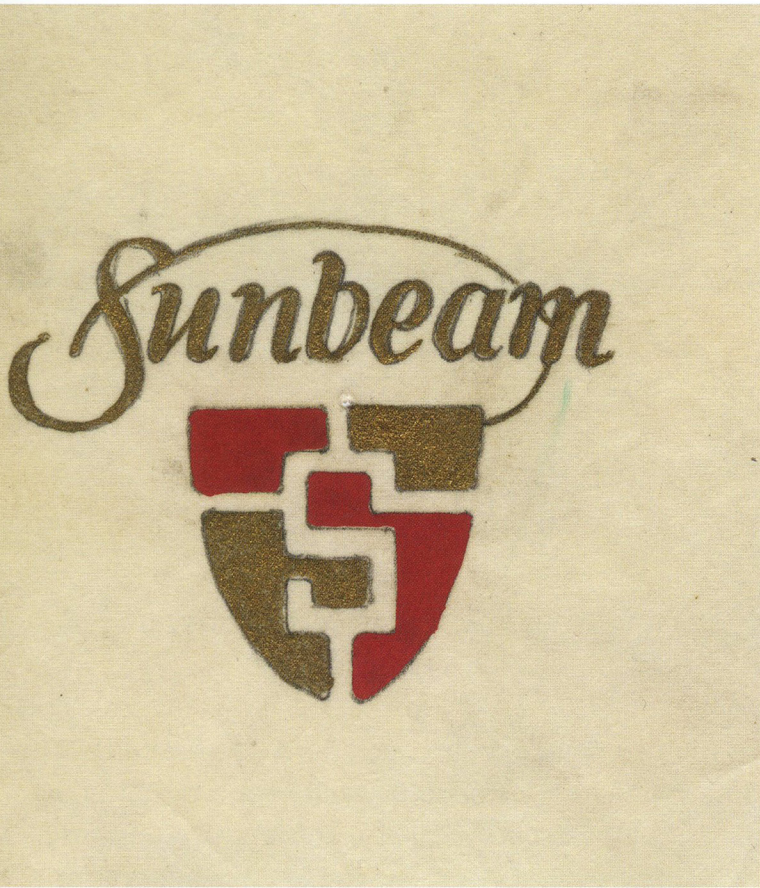
**2** SET THE  
AUTOMATIC SWITCH  
AND THAT'S ALL.

Read the paper, dress the children, do anything you like. In a few minutes *click!* —the coffee is ready. Coffeemaster shuts itself off, then re-sets itself to keep the coffee hot, all *automatically.*



**3** Remove the brew-top and you have the loveliest of servers for all occasions.





■ *Painted tissue design for Sunbeam Appliances. This is the October 1926 updating of the "S" trademark Iannelli sent to the Chicago Flexible Shaft Company for use on their appliance boxes and several appliances, starting a nearly thirty-year design association with them.*

the street from the Art Institute of Chicago. But then, the fledging group dedicated to preserving the Glessner House and starting its now-famed volunteer-guided architectural tours, operated quietly, with just three staff members in the historic house open a few days a week for tours. The house was also home to the offices of the American Institute of Architects Chicago Chapter and several architectural preservation groups. The Iannelli Archive had found its way to the Glessner House basement storage area, near the Foundation's office in the children's playroom below the front entry stairs. A few of Iannelli's Orpheum Theater posters had been reproduced for sale and were kept in a large flat file cupboard set under the playroom's gleaming, reflective brass wall panel. The Foundation sold those posters at a very reasonable price, and gold ink dust covered my fingers as I rolled them to fit into a cardboard tube. Occasionally the Glessner House curator would emerge from the storage area holding a faucet, and we'd wonder about its genesis and how it fit into Iannelli's career. Forty years later, Jameson's book gave the answers.

Industrial design in the U.S. is often described as having emerged in the 1930s, when the Depression propelled business to invite designers to inspire desire in consumers to build sales. Many of the first practitioners were trained as architects, others worked in advertising or theater, and others were car designers who left Detroit for employment in industry elsewhere. These stylists shaped products, their packaging and promotion, and a new profession.



Iannelli established his design career long before the 1930s. Not only did he design products and packaging in the 1920s, he pioneered industrial design education: in 1912 in California and in 1915 in Chicago, Iannelli initiated classes that trained artists in applied arts. After several groups in the city attempted to start educational programs for industrial arts vocational training, in 1922 local businessmen formed the Association of Arts and Industries to support programs to improve manufactured products, in the belief that design could enhance national business competitiveness and international trade. This group proved to be the most successful, yet it also struggled to establish a formal industrial design program, and, in 1927, hired Iannelli to lead the new program at the Art Institute of Chicago. Iannelli created a curriculum based on Bauhaus principles. However, conflicts between the Association and the Art Institute about finances and the relationship of art with machinery, along with Iannelli's commitment to his Studios, caused him to resign. In 1930, the School of the Art Institute hired a new director to lead its industrial design program and soon the Association withdrew its support.

As the 1871 Great Fire attracted architects to Chicago, in the early 1930s, the planning for the 1933-1934 Century of Progress drew designers to this city to create the pavilions and related print and products for the companies that would exhibit at the Fair. Also in those years, the country's two most powerful retailers, Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Ward, both headquartered in Chicago, established their internal design departments: Ward started its Bureau of Design in

1931 and Sears formed its Dept. 817 Merchandise Development and Testing Laboratory in 1934. In this heady environment, Iannelli surely must have been influenced by the output of corporate design staffs, the growing number of local consultant offices, and the work of New York designers serving Chicago clients. For example, Sears engaged Henry Dreyfuss to design the 1933 Toperator washing machine and Raymond Loewy for the 1935-1939 series of popular Coldspot refrigerators. And design education was invigorated when, in 1937, the Association of Arts and Industries founded the New Bauhaus with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy as its director, installed in the vacant Marshall Field mansion on Prairie Avenue.

Chicago's neighborhoods pulsed with countless manufacturing companies. It was also a city built by enterprising immigrants, who often maintained close connections within their ethnic communities. Notably, Iannelli worked with Swedish engineer Ivar Jepson to design graphics and products for the Chicago Flexible Shaft Company (CFS), renamed the Sunbeam Corporation in 1946, and Italian craftsman Antonio Pasin at the Radio Steel & Manufacturing Company, which later became Radio Flyer. Pasin, about ten years younger than Iannelli, emigrated to the U.S. as a teenager a few years after Iannelli arrived and, by 1917, had started his business building children's wooden wagons. Iannelli designed Radio Steel's unique pavilion for the Century of Progress fair. An early example of a building as brand statement, the pavilion featured a boy on his Radio Flyer wagon and a globe in a three-dimensional interpretation of the company's signature "Coaster Boy."



A short distance from Radio Steel's plant on Grand Avenue, Iannelli developed a long relationship with the Chicago Flexible Shaft Company, located at Central Avenue and Roosevelt Road. Ivar Jepson, son of a prosperous Swedish land owner and farmer, was an engineer educated in Sweden and Berlin. Seeking opportunity, he came to Chicago in 1925. A member of the Swedish Engineers' Society, on Chicago's north side, suggested a job at CFS, and Jepson found his calling. A few years later, CFS introduced its Mixmaster, which revolutionized the American kitchen and, despite the Depression, sold to millions of frugal homemakers. Jepson earned more than 100 design and utility patents before retiring in 1963. His prodigious innovations were responsible for many types of best-selling household appliances.

As manager of product development and research, Jepson supervised his staff and chose consultants. In 1926 Iannelli created the S-shaped trademark for packaging and products. Its color and form echo the red and gold angular, outlined shapes of his mid-1910s graphic design. Presumably Iannelli reported not only to Jepson, but also worked with CFS president, lawyer Michael McArdle, the son of Irish immigrants, who claimed design patents for sleek, streamlined appliances of the early 1930s. In 1938, Iannelli design patented the chrome double-vessel vacuum-action coffee brewer with matching creamer and sugar bowl. The set included the tray from the earlier cylindrical Coffeemaster design patented in 1934 by McArdle. Thanks to Jepson's solutions for temperature control, this was CFS's first fully automatic coffeemaker. Water heated in

the lower vessel, steamed into coffee grounds held in the upper chamber, then after the brewed coffee dripped into the lower vessel, its heating element kept the coffee at the proper serving temperature. Some years later, the four ball feet of Iannelli's design were replaced with straight ones. This coffeemaker sold for 25 years. Two decades after he designed Sunbeam's logo, Iannelli presented concepts for a toaster in 1947, but Jepson chose another designer. Perhaps in the post-war business climate, the Italian artist's Mediterranean temperament was no longer compatible with the Swedish engineer's Baltic reserve.

Beginning in the 1920s, Iannelli was active in designers' organizations, many with confusingly similar names. The American Designers Institute, founded in Chicago in 1938, in 1951 became the Industrial Designers Institute (IDI). The Society of Industrial Designers, founded in New York in 1944, was retitled the American Society of Industrial Designers (ASID) in 1955. The IDI and ASID merged in 1965 to become the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), which continues today.

Iannelli participated in IDI events and the exhibitions it organized to promote the work of its members. In 1954, he displayed the Sunbeam Coffeemaster and several Oster appliances in IDI's first exhibition, held at the Illinois Institute of Technology. In October 1956, *Industrial Design* magazine (founded in 1954 in New York) published a special issue on Chicago's product design, which included short profiles about consultancies, features about design staffs at key manufacturing companies, and articles on



education and professional practice in the city. Iannelli Studios was described as:

*another of Chicago's original design studios, having been founded in 1915. Alfonso Iannelli came from Italy to New York, Los Angeles, and then to Chicago, practicing his art of architectural sculpture and, jointly, industrial design, largely in the appliance field. Like his sculpture, his designs are related as closely as possible to the architectural environment. An IDI member, his clients include Eversharp and Illinois Testing Labs.*

The profile included a photo of Iannelli handling a product model and a photo of a neurocalograph machine for the latter client.

It seems somehow appropriate that the first issue of the newsletter of the newly formed IDSA, in April 1965, announced the passing of a Pennsylvania member and Alfonso Iannelli, stating, "and Mr. Iannelli had been long-time members of the Industrial Designers Institute and had participated actively in IDI programs and will be genuinely missed by the Society and all of the designers who knew and worked with them." After more than a half-century of work in Chicago, from the 1915 advertisements for Marshall Field's to his household appliances and buildings of the 1960s, Alfonso Iannelli's vision of design as a defining aspect of everyday life contributed to the profession's first chapters and to the foundation of Chicago's under-recognized importance in American twentieth century design. ■



Logo design as a color decal on the 1936 Ivar Jepson Sunbeam Ironmaster and its companion Clothes Sprayer.