

The Quiet Dissemination of American Modernism: George Sakier's Designs for American Radiator

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George Sakier was a versatile practitioner who worked as an interior designer, painter, art director, engineer, and packaging designer. He was also one of the original industrial designers in America. His career path was as diverse as it was extensive, and his impact upon the development of a modern design aesthetic pervaded not only in the United States but also in Europe.

To understand Sakier's ability to produce designs that have become so pervasive in the American household, one must look to his earlier career—a period of time that *Fortune* magazine called his “trek from camouflage to bathtubs.”¹ During this era, particularly in the 1930s, Sakier emerged as an arbiter of modernism and as one of the first industrial designers. His bathroom and kitchen fixture designs for the American Radiator Company reveal some of the earliest embodiments of a uniquely American modernist style. Through the market appeal and affordability of his industrially designed products, Sakier quietly disseminated his modern aesthetic throughout the country.

From Camouflage to Bathtubs

Sakier's father, Samuel, immigrated to Palestine as a member of the Bilu'im—a group of Zionists who fled Russia during the 1880s to avoid the anti-Semitic “May Laws” of Tsar Alexander III.² The Bilu'im were trailblazing idealists that established an agrarian cooperative society.³ Life in Palestine was fraught with disease and drought, and by the turn of the century, Samuel left the farming experiment to settle in New York City, where he married and worked as a paper and twine merchant.⁴ George was born the second of three children in December 1897. Although the family could not have been considered wealthy, each of the three children was given a high level of education. While both his siblings remained closely involved with their Jewish heritage (his older Brother Abraham was an ardent supporter of the Zionist movement and his younger sister Helen was an active board member of a prominent Jewish social agency), George took a different path. His early exposure to

1 George Nelson, “Both Fish and Fowl,” *Fortune* (February 1934), 40.

2 Sakier's descendents believe that the original family name may have been “Sirkin” and that Samuel, like many Jewish immigrants of his time, may have changed his name when he moved to the United States.

3 For more on the BILU Movement, see: Samuel Kurland and Hechalutz Organization of America, *Biluum, Pioneers of Zionist Colonization* (New York: Pub. for Hechalutz organization of America by Scopus publishing company, 1943).

4 “Samuel Sakier,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1934. This obituary claims that Samuel “settled in New York about 1900,” but given that George was born in 1897 and that George's older brother Abraham was also born in New York, it is likely that Samuel arrived in the US as early as 1894.

Figure 1
George Sakier (on right) at age eleven with
his older brother Abraham and younger
sister Helen.



European modernism, and perhaps to the social messages implied therein, seems to have determined the direction of his work (see Figure 1).

Growing up in Brooklyn, Sakier was educated as an engineer at the Pratt Institute and Columbia University, where his evident talents in the field led to his authorship of the textbook, *Machine Design and Descriptive Geometry*, at the age of only 19.⁵ His interest in art and painting apparently began during his military service; in 1917, he joined the newly formed Camouflage Corps, for which he designed and painted camouflage patterns.

Designed concealment was a relatively new concept at the time; the American Armed Forces had learned of it from the French army, which before the war established an organized corps of young and promising artists, architects, and set designers. Sakier's own training for the Camouflage Corps began at Columbia University, where he and other young artists studied the new concept of camouflage. Military recruiters touted camouflage as "one of the newest military arts—the art of concealing things from hostile observation . . . by painted canvas."⁶ The role of the newly appointed *camoufleur* was to follow soldiers into battle, where he would use his artistry to "spread his best imitation of the magic veil of invisibility" to protect the new technologies and weapons that were being used against the Germans.⁷

Whether Sakier's time with the Camouflage Corps brought him to Europe is unclear; however, we do know that in 1922, after his service, he traveled on his own to France by freighter. After touring the European Continent, he stayed in Paris through the next several years, writing articles for various publications to make money while he began to investigate his abilities as a painter.⁸ His paintings, typically figural or landscapes, would remain the great passion in his life, and when he had amassed his fortune from his industrial design pursuits, he moved to Paris to spend the rest of his life focusing on art.

His years spent abroad in the 1920s were concurrent with the most crucial formative moments of early modern design. Among them was the Paris 1925 *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, which offered many Americans their first glimpse into the realm of modernism—an experience that would inspire not only the future of American modernism but the later emergence of industrial design as a professional field. But Sakier was not content to follow French trends. As a contributor to numerous European periodicals in France, he was able to encourage the Trocadéro Museum to mount an exhibition of a sizable collection of Mayan artifacts that had previously lain dormant in the museum's storage cellar—thus proving "to the French that America had an ancient art."⁹ This exhibition was for Europeans a very early nod toward the acceptance of any form of artistic authority from the Americas, and its creation was not the only time that Sakier would

5 "George Sakier | Industrial Designers Society of America - IDSA", n.d., <http://www.idsa.org/content/george-sakier> (accessed October 12, 2011).

6 "Faking as an Art in Conducting War," *New York Times*, June 24, 1917.

7 "Call for 'Fakers' to Fool Germans," *New York Times*, September 4, 1917.

8 Leslie A. Piña, *Fostoria: Designer George Sakier* (Schiffer Pub., Atglen, 1996), 14. This text, written for present-day collectors of the many Fostoria glassware designers, offers the only cohesive biographical study on Sakier and was a great asset to this study.

9 Nelson, "Both Fish and Fowl," 97.

influence the design discourse abroad. A decade later, when his glassware designs for Fostoria first began receiving wide acclaim, he would again influence the European modern aesthetic when “he won the distinction of having his own designs for glass pirated in Europe.”¹⁰

Sakier returned to New York around 1926. While in Europe, he had gained experience as an assistant art director for French *Vogue*, and he worked as art director for *Modes and Manners* and *Harper’s Bazaar* until the end of the decade.¹¹ By then, he had also secured jobs as head designer at the American Radiator and Sanitary Corporation and as a consultant designer for Fostoria Glass Company. His service with both companies would last for decades, and his work led him to wide acclaim in the new realm of industrial design.

Fostoria, under whose employ Sakier made his most lauded and recognizable work, was founded in 1887 in Fostoria, OH. The location for the original factory was chosen “to take advantage of the free natural gas offered [there] as an inducement to industrial users with the money to set up a factory.”¹² The company later moved to West Virginia; Sakier would send his designs here for elaboration by an in-house design team, and the products would be manufactured and marketed to middle-class households all over the country. Sakier was hired as part of Fostoria’s aggressive design overhaul—an attempt to keep pace with the competition by modernizing its wares.¹³ Under his direction, the company began to offer a broad range of tableware, most of which evinced a combination of neoclassical and modernist sensibilities. Fostoria prospered from Sakier’s “simpler, friendlier” modernism, and its success inspired other glassware companies to embrace the trend in the 1930s.¹⁴

As dynamic and innovative as Sakier’s designs were, they often retained classical elements. Because he was designing for the American middle-class consumer, even his more avant-garde glass pieces tended to merely imply modernism rather than to fully embody it. His geometric forms for footed stemware were often accented with classical floral etching; candelabras with geometric accents retained column-like fluting; and goblet stems were topped with detailing similar to Roman capitals.

American Radiator and the Culture of the Bathroom

Sakier’s full expression of modern, utilitarian purity and social awareness is most evident and compelling in his work with the American Radiator and Standard Sanitary Corporation. At first glance, plumbing may seem an unlikely catalyst for the proliferation of modern design in America. However, plumbing and its accompanying fixtures are, in fact, rife with modernist implications. Other parts of the house did not lend themselves as readily to such modern advances. “Designers and manufacturers,” Kristina Wilson has written, “found it more difficult to argue that a modernist sofa,

10 Ibid.

11 Piña, *Fostoria*, 8.

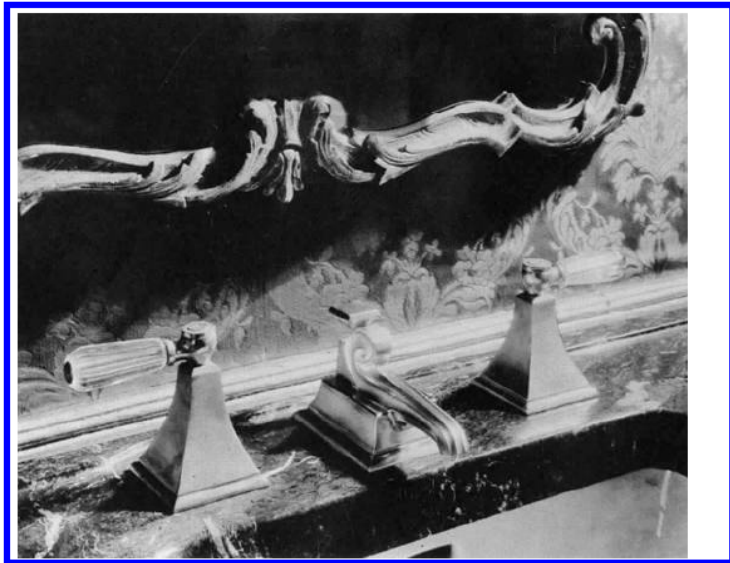
12 Charles Lane Venable et al., *China and Glass in America, 1880-1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray* (Dallas Museum of Art, 2000), 174.

13 Ibid.

14 “Notes on Glass Design,” *Advertising Arts* (January 1933), 21. Quoted in Kristina Wilson, *Livable modernism: interior decorating and design during the Great Depression* (Yale University Press in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, 2004).

Figure 2

An example of Sakier's earlier luxury fixtures. Faucet mounted on black marble sink top.



dining chair, or vanity table embodied any sort of technological improvement over their period-styled counterparts.”¹⁵ Bathrooms were also particularly American in their implementation and significance. As early as 1898, Adolf Loos had pointed to plumbing as the technological arena where America and England had far surpassed the Germanic culture. For Loos, the culture of the bathroom was an empowering form of national advancement: “For only that nation that approaches the English in water usage can keep pace with them economically; only that nation that exceeds the English in water usage is chosen to overtake them in world dominance.”¹⁶ By the 1930s, not only had the modern bathroom become entirely pervasive in the American home, but it was also a completely new typology, suitable for experimentation and innovation by the country’s burgeoning field of industrial designers. It appealed to the new consciousness of utility and hygiene, and, better yet, its status as a new design paradigm left it free of the aesthetic restraints of classicism and historicism that were so prevalent in other aspects of domestic design.¹⁷ As Paul T. Frankl pointed out, “Chippendale never designed a bathtub... we have been forced to use our own ingenuity in planning [the bathroom].”¹⁸

Sakier began working for The American Radiator Company (later the American Radiator and Standard Sanitary Corporation and now known as American Standard) in 1927, as Head of the Bureau of Design Development. He was one of the company’s first in-house full time industrial designers, and he remained there through the 1940s.¹⁹ The establishment of a design bureau represented for the company a departure from the tradition of functionality that was common to the plumbing industry at the time.²⁰ American Radiator hoped to enlist a new level of aesthetics to replace the engineer-driven designs of the past. The bathroom fixtures and lavatory

15 Kristina Wilson, *Livable modernism: Interior Decorating and Design During the Great Depression* (Yale University Press in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, 2004), 12.

16 Adolf Loos, “Plumbers” (1898), quoted in: Nadir Lahiji and Daniel S. Friedman, *Plumbing: Sounding Modern Architecture* (Princeton Architectural Press, NY, 1997), 18.

17 For an excellent discussion on this topic, see Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste* (Princeton Architectural Press, NY, 1997), 25-40.

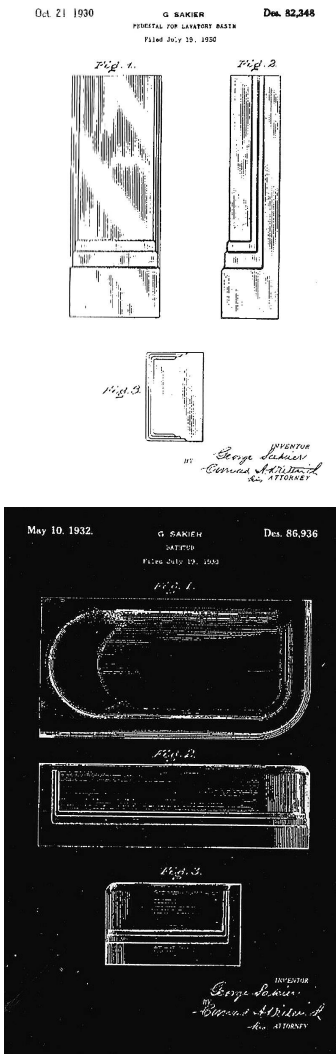
18 Paul T. Frankl, “Baths and Bath-Dressing Rooms,” *House and Garden* (August 1927), 51-5. Quoted in *Ibid.*: 25.

19 Piña, *Fostoria*, 9.

20 Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (JHU Press, 2002), 202.

Figure 3

Patent drawings of the Neo-Classic line for the Waldorf Astoria Hotel (lavatory basin pedestal, top; bathtub, bottom)



panels that Sakier designed for the company would ultimately become his most modern and arguably most influential contributions to industrial design.

In his first years at American Radiator, his designs stayed close to the typical neoclassical forms that drew great interest from upper class consumers (see Figure 2). Critic Sheldon Cheney wrote of his early works, “Sakier was creating exhibition ensembles as luxurious as any of those advertised, for their ‘rich and Oriental splendor,’ for their Greco-Roman ‘period’ authenticity, or for their Spanish exoticism.”²¹ One bathroom design in particular, which included oversized tubs and gold taps, was priced at an opulent \$7,000. Despite this application of ornament, Cheney, an ardent modernist, conceded that Sakier’s design prowess shone through: “[Sakier’s] work was always distinguished by a delicately perceptive discrimination and a genuine originality in new material use.”²²

All of this opulence would, of course, fall away in the aftermath of the economic collapse of 1929, after which Sakier would turn his attention toward a simpler and more astringent aesthetic. Shortly after the market crash, construction began on the new Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City. The architecture firm, Schultz and Weaver, designed the remarkable building, then the largest hotel in the world, with more than 2,000 guest rooms and 300 residential suites.²³ Theo Arens, president of American Radiator and Sakier’s boss, was determined to win the contract for the bathroom installations, and he set Sakier to work designing an entirely new line of fixtures for the hotel. The result was Sakier’s Neo-Classic line, a misleading title given its strong lines and geometric shapes (see Figure 3). In fact, he meant for the name to be interpreted literally; he intended for the fixtures to become the “new classic” for bathrooms. The design established an aesthetic based upon the utilitarian function of the plumbing and machinery with which it operated.²⁴ Schultz was pleased with the designs, and American Radiator won out over Kohler, the hotel company’s previous supplier. The success bolstered Sakier’s notoriety, propelling his designs into numerous journals and magazines that praised the work as an embodiment of the emerging machine aesthetic. Architect Raymond Hood, who designed the American Radiator’s own high-rise building a few years earlier, remarked that the fixtures had “an architectural character that blends them into the design of the room. They have the basic quality of good design,” he added, “of being straightforward and simple.”²⁵

The Neo-Classic bathroom concept was exhibited in one of the display rooms at The American Radiator and Standard Sanitary Corporation, and, in it, Sakier combined the modernized fixtures with elements of pared-down classicism to achieve maximum appeal to consumers. Walter Rendell Storey, art critic for the *New York Times*, described the fixtures as moving toward a “smart simplicity,” where the “old-time fussiness of the ornamented bathroom has been

21 Sheldon Cheney and Martha Smathers Candler Cheney, *Art and the machine: an account of industrial design in 20th-century America* (Acanthus Press, 1992), 78.

22 Ibid.

23 Joseph J. Korom, *The American Skyscraper, 1850-1940: A Celebration of Height* (Branden Books, 2008), 423.

24 Piña, *Fostoria*, 109.

25 Raymond Hood quote originally posted in “What Others Say,” a promotional brochure for the Neo-Classical line. Quoted in: Ibid., 113.

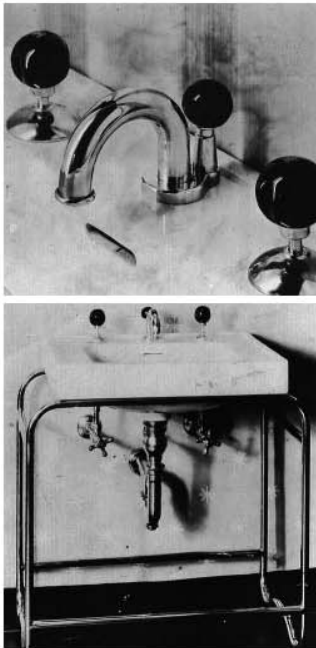
Figure 4

A *Directoire* Bathroom display room containing Neo-Classic fixtures and pilasters applied to walls.



Figure 5

Chromium plated sink fixtures with tubular steel sink support.



eliminated, and a decorative type of interior developed in which all details are unified.²⁶ Sakier designed the display room, titled the *Directoire Interior*, in its entirety. He intended for the clean lines of the modern fixtures to blend with the more historicized elements of the interior (see Figure 4). Narrow vertical pilasters of dark green marble punctuated the walls. Near their capitals, which were made of gold mirror glass, interpretive frieze panels were set onto the pistachio green walls, and the Neo-Classic porcelain fixtures were a slightly deeper green. A sparse rectangular plate of mirror was mounted above the sink, and a pair of niche shelving units flanked the doorway, which was also left free of molding or decoration. The golden accents of the capitals were mimicked in the faucets and handles of the sink and bathtub. Other than a few tertiary elements, there seemed to be very little coordination between the innovative fixtures and the colorful classical decoration of the background. This may in large part be because in this early incarnation of the modern lavatory, the plumbing industry had yet to challenge the bright color and period styling of domestic interiors. This shift would occur gradually throughout the 1930s, particularly with the increased emphasis on hospital-like cleanliness.²⁷

One of Sakier's most popular lavatory stands from the early 1930s was especially emblematic of this machine-age aesthetic (see Figure 5). Geared toward mass production, the sink's design was minimalistic in its components, and the fixtures recalled a geometric purity coupled with durable and distinctly modern materials. The supporting framework for the porcelain basin was composed of tubular steel, and although the material had been popular in European furniture design since the mid-1920s, this represented one of the earliest adoptions of the material in the United States (Sakier filed for a patent of his design in 1930.)²⁸ The steel tubing was not simply a reflection of the European vanguard; in many ways, it was representative of a newly integrated system of plumbing. The steel tubes referenced the piping mechanics of a modern system of water transfer and waste disposal. This thin, sleek, steel element did not conceal the lavatory's inner workings; instead it exposed the supply pipes and plumbing fixtures that serviced the basin and incorporated them into the overall design. It was rounded at all corners, emphasizing the ease and temporality of installation and use; this was not a unit for permanent use, but rather one that could be removed and replaced. Not only did the minimal tubing imply a high level of hygienic control, but it was also highly functional. The steel support was strong enough to support the porcelain basin, and horizontal members along the sides of the framework provided lateral support while also serving as convenient towel racks.

The sink's fixtures were also representative of their functionality. The water supply and drain control knobs were made of durable porcelain, and their spherical form adhered to an aesthetic of geometric purity. The faucet is chromium-plated metal,

26 Walter Rendell Storey, "Gay Decorations for the Dining Table," *New York Times*, February 28, 1932. The material and color details in the description that follows are also taken from this article.

27 Lupton and Miller, *Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 38.

28 Piña, *Fostoria*, 112.

Figure 6
The lavatory system in a display room.



and its tubular form mimics that of the basin's steel supports. Its rounded profile provided a steady downward stream of water while also mirroring the bend of the exposed pea trap below the basin. These elements served to further relate the lavatory's aesthetic to its function, while evincing Sakier's ability as an arbiter of the new form language. In a true sign of the modern age, this lavatory was reportedly chosen for the restrooms in the Atlantic Clipper, Pan-American's groundbreaking transcontinental luxury "air boat" that took to the skies in 1939.²⁹

The display room that Sakier designed to showcase this particular washbasin departed in marked ways from his earlier Neo-Classic showroom (see Figure 6). Again, we note the contrast of the stark, modern fixtures against a brightly colored interior. The wall coverings are of spun glass in alternating bands of sea green and white, and the floor is sand-colored linoleum with black inlay.³⁰ But here the similarities end. Although the integrated bathtubs in both showrooms were from the Neo-Classic line, the abrupt chamfered edge of the original was now rounded for a more streamlined effect. This streamlining was reiterated in the curved corners of the display room walls and the sleek tubular elements of Sakier's sink. Absent were the overt classical references, so insistent before. The horizontal banding on the walls was more a nod to the Austrian modernists than to Roman ornament, and the circular mirror and rectangular doorway were positioned as geometric objects rather than traditional elements. Even the spherical light fixture in the center of the room favored a geometric purity over a historical reference. Sakier's designs were beginning to reach beyond their functionality and into the overall aesthetic of the room, resulting in a more cohesive design model.

Sakier's bathroom designs continued to develop and grow in popularity. In a forecast of the designs at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, fashion editor Virginia Pope wrote of him: "sensing trends is what [he] calls studying 'audience psychology' – keeping ahead of the game."³¹ In the new realm of applied art, design was a dynamic, ever-changing process, and businesses depended on this obsolescence to create a constant stream of demand. The American Radiator Company's bathroom exhibition, designed entirely by Sakier, boasted the "latest developments in bathroom design and sanitary plumbing."³²

The concept of obsolescence, largely a product of industry and its consideration for the consumer's rapidly changing tastes, proved problematic in the area of bathroom fixtures, which were primarily marketed not to the average consumer but instead to the architects and builders who would specify them in new construction. Thus, the equipment was expected to last a good deal longer than other household products and appliances. For example, while Sakier's various new glassware designs for Fostoria could be

29 Harold L. Van Doren, *Industrial Design; a Practical Guide* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), 23. For more information on the Atlantic Clipper, see: Fredrick Graham, "Atlantic Clipper Sails in Like Gull," *New York Times*, February 25, 1939.

30 Walter Rendell Storey, "Unification in Modern Design: George Sakier, Interior Decorator," *The Studio* 123 (March 1942), 68.

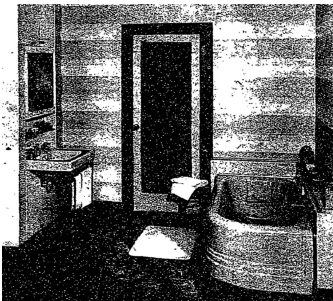
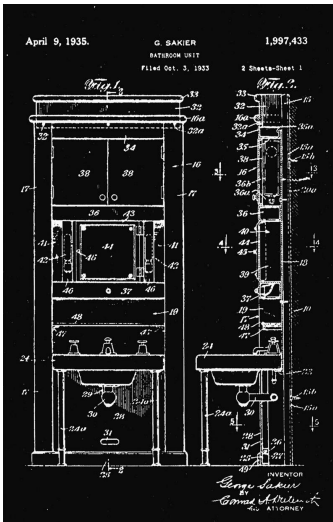
31 Virginia Pope, "Craftsmen Find a Patron in Industry," *New York Times*, August 21, 1932.

32 Century of Progress International Exposition, *Official Guide Book of the Fair, 1933* (Chicago: A Century of Progress, 1933), 105.

Figure 7

Top: patent drawing for the lavatory segment of the Arco Unit Panel System.

Bottom: bathtub and lavatory units (shown in sheet metal)



continuously added to production with little risk of outdated the previous lines, the tolerance for such rapid change, and subsequent obsolescence, in the bathroom was considerably lower. Because of the permanence of the fixtures and the organization of the laborers, the bathroom and plumbing industry was generally slower to respond to new technologies. Aside from its inherent reluctance to innovation, the plumbing fixture industry was also facing a growing number of charges of an even greater economic and social nature. George Nelson, in a 1934 piece for *Fortune* on the new vocation of industrial design, cited this social neglect as leading to the “basic indictment of the reactionary building industry which, in an industrial capitalistic country, is technologically unable to build houses cheap enough to house two-thirds of the people above a minimal standard of decency.”³³ An article in *Architectural Record* pointed out that, despite the relative achievements of American plumbing, a 1934 study of 64 typical cities revealed that “5% of all dwellings had no running water, 13.5% had no private indoor water closets, 20.2% had neither bathtubs nor showers.”³⁴

Sakier answered this social charge with his design for the first prefabricated bathroom, the Arco Unit Panel System, released in 1933 for the Accessories Company, a division of American Radiator (see Figure 7).³⁵ Cheney called it Sakier’s “machine for cleanliness”—the bathroom’s response to Le Corbusier’s visualization of the home as a “machine à habiter.”³⁶ The system consisted of three separate components—a washbasin, bathtub, and toilet—each containing all the necessary fixtures and accessories in an adjustable metal wall section for easy installation in new construction or joined to existing plumbing for renovation work. The three main components, along with additional paneling for the flooring and walls, could be interlocked to create a single unified system, or each part could be used separately, depending on need and budget. The lavatory unit, by far the most complex and inclusive, contained a porcelain bowl with tubular metal legs and chromium-finished faucet components. The sink element was attached to a wall panel six to eight inches deep—deep enough to conceal the plumbing pipes and to avoid disturbing the building wall. The panel included shelving and a mirrored medicine closet, bordered by lighting that conveniently plugged into the nearest wall socket. The panel was made of two vertically telescoping pieces to accommodate rooms of various heights, and the sink legs easily adjusted to account for uneven floors.³⁷ The toilet component held the tank within the wall unit to remain accessible for quick repairs and, once again, to avoid any pipe installation within the building’s walls. An available option in this unit was a convector radiator, capable of heating an 8’ x 10’ room, particularly in the area of the toilet.³⁸ And, of course, the colors and finishes of each component were customizable to suit the consumer’s taste. The system was a revolutionary contribution to the

33 Nelson, “Both Fish and Fowl,” 97.

34 “Technical News and Research: A Prefabricated Bathroom” *Architectural Record*, (January 1937), 39.

35 Note that *Architectural Record* in 1936 and 1937 consistently referred to these panels as “Arcade Sectionals.” Elsewhere, the systems are referred to as Arco.

36 Cheney, *Art and the machine*, 79.

37 Walter Rendell Storey, “Ease and Style in Outdoor Furniture,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1933.

38 “Technical News and Research: A Prefabricated Bathroom,” 46.

development of prefabrication and industrial design in America. Its high functionality and technical beauty earned the Arco Panel Unit System a position in the influential Machine Art exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1934.³⁹

The entire system was designed to optimize comfort in use and convenience in installation, while also imparting a modernist look. More importantly, it was intended to be readily affordable and widely applicable. The same year as the MoMA exhibit, it was reported that 133 of the units were being installed in an apartment building in Washington, DC, and 400 more were slated for installation in another building.⁴⁰ Within a few years, the Arco Units were installed in thousands of homes and apartments.⁴¹ The immediate interest in the concept seemed to validate Sakier's social initiative and design ideal. However, the project never reached the level of commercial success that his other lines with American Radiator enjoyed. Like so many other attempts to market prefabricated components in the 1930s and 1940s, including several later efforts by Buckminster Fuller, the unit was never adopted as a prototype. Perhaps consumer interest waned when presented with such a rigidly modernist system; perhaps the consumer could not reconcile the notion of adaptable bathroom components with preconceptions of the architectural fixedness of previous components. Most likely to blame were the plumbers and contractors who failed to evolve in response to the new technology. American architect Alexander Kira reflected on the stubbornness within the "structuring of the plumbing industry, which has followed the pattern peculiar to the home-building industry: field erection and assembly of thousands of independently produced and often unrelated items."⁴²

Despite these problems, Sakier continued to investigate prefabrication as a mode of production and installation with the introduction of the "packaged kitchen" assembly for the Accessories Company in 1936. The kitchen panels were intended to complement those of the bathroom system and implemented many of the same design ideals. Steel wall sections, each of which were capable of sustaining a bearing load of 7,000 pounds, were assembled and framed into the house, and the cabinets and equipment were mounted on this system.⁴³ The system was modular, offering 15, 20, and 35-inch segments to allow for flexibility in arrangement and to accommodate different types of layouts. For a large kitchen with a pantry, the retail price was around \$500, but the smaller, straight-line assemblies could run as low as \$275. The units were broken down into different construction types to allow for the various levels of budgeting. Different assemblies were offered for houses in several different price ranges: \$15,000 and above, \$8,000 to \$15,000, and less than \$8,000. Sakier designed the kitchen system to be highly functional, while also promoting modern hygiene and efficiency.

39 For more information on the exhibit, see *Machine Art: March 6 to April 30, 1934*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969).

40 Nelson, "Both Fish and Fowl," 98.

41 Cheney, *Art and the machine*, 79.

42 Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom* (Viking Press, 1976), 9.

43 This description is paraphrased from "Technical News and Research: Integrated Kitchens," *Architectural Record* (October 1936).

In 1936, he wrote an article for *House and Garden* intended to appeal to female consumers, who were the primary market for such fixtures. He equated the chore of cooking with a type of artistry and invited his female readers to “imagine a breadboard that lets down at the touch of a finger,” or “a ‘kitchen dashboard’ with sockets and switches for electric appliances.”⁴⁴ There was a designated area for a paper towel roll right next to the sink faucets, “where, of course, it should be.”⁴⁵ If his prefabricated bathroom panels were “machines for cleanliness,” then his kitchen systems were machines for cooking, cleaning, storing, and household management. Sakier was able to successfully combine modern modes of design and assembly with the traditional methods of household engineering promoted a decade earlier by Christine Frederick, who argued that each aspect of the kitchen should be composed to minimize labor and maximize comfort and ease of use.⁴⁶

A Modest Legacy of Modernism

With each of these designs, Sakier sought to inject the new ideals of modernism into the accessories of domestic life. As an artist, his work for American Radiator seemed an odd fit—even to him—although ultimately he found it a satisfying situation: “At dinner,” he once wrote, “when my partner feels it is about time to ask what I do, I generally, albeit I have more romantic wares to offer, answer that I design bathtubs. The response is electric, earnest, and most gratifying. I am now sure of her complete attention for at least three courses... I become a social asset.”⁴⁷ Although painting remained his passion, Sakier relished the notion that his designs had spread so broadly across the country, imparting his ideals of functionality and efficiency into innumerable homes.

Acknowledgements

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44 George Sakier, “Her Kitchen,” *House and Garden* 70 (October 1936), 142.

45 Ibid.

46 Christine Frederick, *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* (American School of Home Economics, 1920).

47 George Sakier, “Hot and Cold,” photocopy of undated article in George Sakier Foundation archives. Quoted in Piña, *Fostoria*.