

V&A Academy

MID- CENTURY MODERN DESIGN

Tuesdays 21 April – 19 May 2026,
14:00-16:30



Introduction



Tuesdays 21 April – 19 May 2026, 14:00-16:30. Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 30 June 2026.

Overview

In the aftermath of World War II, and against the backdrop of Cold War politics, design assumed an important role in the reconstruction of economies and national identities. Governments, organisations, companies and individuals sought to promote modern design to a public which had suffered privations and rationing since the Depression of the 1930s. New materials and processes, original forms and inventive imagery generated exciting visions of the domestic space and its furnishing, offering the possibility of a brighter future for all and fuelling the optimism of the age. Key figures including Charles & Ray Eames, Gio Ponti, Hans Wegner, Robin & Lucienne Day, Timo Sarpaneva, and Tapio Wirkkala, and companies such as Iittala, Arabia, Venini, Herman Miller and Knoll, all contributed to the development of the ‘new look’ of mid-century modern design. The course examines visually and contextually the diverse range of objects created between c.1940 and 1965 (particularly furniture, ceramics and glass) and focuses on the responses of different countries (USA, Great Britain, France, Italy, Brazil, Scandinavia, and Finland) to the challenges and opportunities of the post-war period.

Your course leader

Dr. Elisabeth Darby lectures on 19th, 20th and 21st century decorative arts and design, and was formerly Programme Director of the MA in Contemporary Design at Sotheby's Institute of Art. Her most recent book *Re-Issue, Re-Imagine, Re-Make: Appropriation in Contemporary Furniture Design* was published by Lund Humphries in 2020.

Programme

Week 1 – 21 April

- 13.50 Welcome. Introduction, Style and Society, **Lis Darby**
- 15.30 Mid-Century Modern American Furniture: New Materials and New Forms, **Lis Darby**

Week 2 – 28 April

- 14.00 The Golden Years: Tradition and Innovation in Post War Scandinavian furniture, **Lis Darby**
- 15.30 Scandinavia: Craft and Industry, **Lis Bogdan**

Week 3 – 5 May

- 14.00 Great Britain: From the Bomb to the Beatles, **Lis Darby**
- 15.30 Post-War Furniture in France: Modernism and the Decorator, **Lis Darby**

Week 4 – 12 May

- 14.00 Italy: La Dolce Vita, **Lis Bogdan**
- 15.30 Post-War Glass & Ceramics, **Lis Bogdan**

Week 5 – 19 May

- 14.00 Beyond Europe: Post War Brazilian furniture, **Lis Darby**
- 15.30 Conclusion • From Austerity to Affluence: From Post-War to Pop, **Lis Darby**

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.