

A chance discovery at a local estate sale whets Larry Weinberg's appetite for an undiscovered facet of midcentury modernism

spanish acquisition

Midcentury modern

Spanish design is not only underrepresented in the collecting market today, it is virtually unknown outside of a few iconic pieces, such as architect Javier Carvajal's segmented Granada chair of 1964. Blame a combination of factors including global resistance to dealing with the Franco regime as well as the economic austerity, dearth of a middle class, and prevailing conservative tastes that characterized 1950s and '60s Spain. Few modern-minded designs likely achieved serial production in this period, and even fewer found a U.S. import outlet akin to Dansk Designs and M. Singer & Sons, champions of Scandinavian and Italian design, respectively.

So it is remarkable when a cache of 1960s Spanish furniture and decorative art turns up at a local house sale, as happened earlier this year at the Plandome, New York, estate of George Harvey. His Queens-based company, Display Studios, fabricated exhibition displays for clients such as IBM, Michelin, Barneys New York, and, as it turns out, Carvajal's Spanish Pavilion at the 1964/65

New York World's Fair in nearby Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Archival photographs of the pavilion interior show glass vitrines atop squared columns, and wooden beams twisting down from the gridded ceiling to form medial platforms—likely a big commission for Harvey's atelier. But the fabricator saw a larger opportunity in the project, teaming with pavilion executive director Manuel Ortuno to form a company, Hintrade USA, to import and market a range of Spanish products after the fair.

Somewhat inexplicably, given Harvey's professional embrace of corporate modernism, his time capsule of a house was crowded with provincial and historicist items from the fair's gift shops. Mixed in,

though, were some midcentury gems: glass-mosaic boxes, colorful rag runners, and a rectangular side table with open framing and a floating white-laminate top by Estudio H. Muebles.

But the standouts were the unglazed stoneware vessels and architectural elements by Granadan ceramist Antonio Salvador Orodea, proprietor of the ASO factory in Valdemorillo, outside Madrid. Among the mid-1960s Salvador vessels I procured were textured architectonic forms reminiscent of Danish ceramist Tue Poulsen, an angled bowl with incised patterning à la Sweden's Stig Lindberg, and a swollen, spouted pot with firing variegation that

Clockwise from top left: Glass and alpaca silver mosaic dish, Spanish c. 1965. Granada chair designed by Javier Carvajal for the Spanish Pavilion of the 1964/65 New York World's Fair. Unglazed modular stoneware elements, made for the Spanish Pavilion by Antonio Salvador Orodea. Carvajal in his studio in the late 1950s.



COLLECTING



conjures La Borne potters such as Elisabeth Joulia. Salvador's stylistic dialogue with his European contemporaries was based on direct exposure: After beginning his schooling in Madrid, he spent time studying in the German ceramic center of Selb, and then in France and Belgium.

Even more compelling are the larger architectural elements, found in George Harvey's shed: Unglazed modular rings and square columns Salvador made expressly and probably exclusively for the pavilion. Used as pedestals for jardinières, the stacked, ribbed rings appear in photographs in close proximity to fellow Granadan Carvajal's famed chairs, their round shapes providing a counterpoint to the pavilion's dominant grid pattern, while their ribbing parallels its linear motif—as do the squared columns, analogs to the bronzed aluminum ceiling fixtures made by Lightolier.

Salvador melded industrial production methods with craft nuance in a manner akin to the work of Italian design firm Danese. "My intent is that, in my works, artistic inspiration, artisan experience, and the conception of industrial design should be integrated," Salvador said in a 1972 interview. That intent continued beyond the fair with *Exposición Evolución 66*, a Spanish "good design" exhibition mounted in Madrid in 1966; murals for the Algerian Pavilion

at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan; and a gold medal at the International Handicraft Fair in Munich in 1971 for compositions of geometric ceramic modules connected with metal tubes. These and other efforts propelled Salvador beyond his local market onto a national and international stage—one of very few Spanish designers of his time to do so.

the verdict

Hintrade, alas, did not become Dansk—although it was incorporated, its operational status remains unclear—leaving the field wide open today for rediscovering Spanish mid-mod design. Works by Salvador, made between 1958 and 2003, can be had for very reasonable prices online, primarily from European sources. A caveat:

Most have decorative painting, and Salvador himself said that "the expressiveness of ceramics is sustained mainly in communication of the forms, not in an excess of decoration." Look for pieces on which the applied embellishments enhance rather than detract from the sophisticated architectural shapes. Look also for works dating from the 1960s–70s and/or made for exhibitions, as well as any pieces from the 1971 Munich Fair.

pro tip

For a viewing of best-practice Spanish midcentury design in furniture, lighting, and decorative arts, visit the website for Colegio Oficial Arquitectos de Madrid (coam.org). Look under "Catálogo de Muebles años 50-60" and take notes.



Clockwise from right: Stoneware wall tile made by Salvador for the Spanish Pavilion. Unglazed spouted pot by Salvador, c. 1965. Collection of glass and alpaca silver mosaic objects, Spanish c. 1965. Interior of the Spanish Pavilion of the 1964/65 New York World's Fair, with Salvador jardinières.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: LARRY WEINBERG (3); FUNDACIÓN LOEWE; UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA