

Robert Grier

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Frank Lloyd Wright

George Mann Neidecken

Desk

1908

Oak

144.9 x 102 x 60.6 cm

Gallery 179

### Desk, 1908

The Avery and Queene Ferry Coonley House was completed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his associates in 1907. Commissioned by a rich industrialist from Chicago, the house is considered one of Wright's best designs. George Mann Neidecken oversaw the interior design of the house, which included lighting fixtures, decorative glass, and furniture. The interior of the Avery Coonley House is, unsurprisingly, sprawling and geometric. As the exterior pond reflects the front of the house, the oak furniture reflects the complex, wooded ceilings. Each lampshade, window, chair, and table is interwoven with the complete and nauseating décor. Neidecken, as an instrument of Frank Lloyd Wright's grand vision, contributed greatly to the interior excellence of the house that would become one of Wright's greatest designs.

One note in this architectural orchestra is an oak *desk*, designed in collaboration between Wright and Neidecken. The theme of the desk is comparable to Neidecken's *Combination Writing Desk, Daybed, and Lamp* from the Edward P. Irving Residence. The form is symmetric, and relatively basic. However, the desk's flirtation with simplicity is overshadowed by two pyramidal lamps appended to the mass of drawers, which rise from rectangular legs. The lamps are functional assets of the desk and space defining elements that reflect the complex ideology behind Wright's spatial designs. The drawers, and their associated, anvil-shaped handles, are typical of Neidecken designs under Frank Lloyd Wright. The square wood carving is an extremely simplistic motif that can be found throughout the Avery Coonley House. This geometric motif, along with the brown hue of the oak and lampshades, qualifies the beautiful desk to fit into any of Wright's Prairie school interiors. The desk is small, but heavy in proportions. The legs, namely the central, bisecting pair, contribute to the weightiness of the desk. The design of the feet moldings is attributed to Neidecken, but the geometric, cantilevered form of the desk reflects Wright's architecture.

#### Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959)

Frank Lloyd Wright was born in rural Wisconsin on the eighth of June, 1867. When he was fifteen years old, he moved to Madison to study engineering at the University of Wisconsin. He later moved to Chicago, where he would transform into the most influential architect of his time. He worked as the chief assistant to Louis Sullivan, a well-known architect, but soon set up his own office. In 1889, he married his first wife, Catherine Lee Tobin, and moved to Oak Park in Chicago. He carried out many designs here, and his eclectic style became known as the Prairie School style. Wright would later abandon his family and move to Europe with the wife of a client. His life of fame in America gave way to a complicated existence defined by questionable

ethics. His style changed, but the organic perfection of his designs remained. He built a new home for himself and his mistress, which burned down and killed her. Wright became an outcast of and architect but he continued to work. His style continued to evolve as he designed more western houses. Frank Lloyd Wright produced about one thousand designs, and four hundred of them were built. His style, although difficult to emulate, was immensely influential.

#### George Mann Neidecken (1878-1945)

George Mann Neidecken was a furniture designer who was born in 1878. From Milwaukee, Neidecken studied at the Wisconsin Art Institute and later at the Art Institute of Chicago. He also left to study art in Europe but returned in 1902. He became a teacher of decorative arts, and displayed his designs at exhibits in Chicago. It was here that he became familiar with the prominent Prairie school architects of the time, which led to his employment at Frank Lloyd Wright's studio. He worked with Wright on twelve different structures and became a respected interior designer. Neidecken married in 1905 and eventually established his own furniture factory. After Frank Lloyd Wright fled to Europe, Neidecken began to collaborate with other Prairie school architects.

## Bibliography

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