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Marketing Modernism: *House Beautiful* and the Station Wagon Way of Life

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Abstract

This paper examines a crucial moment in postwar design, in which the shelter press, represented by the American edition of *House Beautiful* magazine, began to market modernism specifically as a lifestyle attainable through the consumption of designed goods.

In June 1950, *House Beautiful* declared the station wagon to be the symbol of postwar America. For the magazine, the station wagon was not just an all-purpose family car; it was a crucial component of a new way of life. This fully-modernized, fully-mechanized lifestyle was predicated upon, above all else, living well. It was about luxury of space and the promise of ease. In the pages of *House Beautiful* magazine, this way of life unfolded as casual, suburban and family-oriented; Station Wagon Living emerged as a package deal that included a point of view, car, house, landscape, furniture, fittings, appliances, and hobbies. In the American 1950s, this became *the* image of postwar modernity.

This essay probes *House Beautiful*'s effort to construct this particular image – the image of the Station Wagon Way of Life – as both a branded lifestyle concept and a marketing strategy, one that was intended to shape American taste and encourage consumption of designed goods. The Station Wagon story further suggests broad cultural implications and perhaps an additional set of compelling questions: Why did *House Beautiful* want to influence taste and consumption in this particular direction? What was the magazine's larger agenda, and how was the Station Wagon image vital to this cause?

Introduction

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This essay probes *House Beautiful*'s effort to construct this particular image – the image of the Station Wagon Way of Life – as both a branded lifestyle concept and a marketing strategy, one that was intended to shape American taste and encourage consumption of designed goods. The Station Wagon story further suggests broad cultural implications and perhaps an additional set of compelling questions: Why did *House Beautiful* want to influence taste and consumption in this particular direction? What was the magazine's larger agenda, and how was the Station Wagon image vital to this cause?[2]

The Station Wagon and a New Way of Life

In 1950, *House Beautiful* declared the station wagon to be the symbol of postwar America. The American station wagon had, since 1910, enjoyed a long history as a commercial vehicle. It was, however, the appearance of Ford's first consumer version in 1937 that rapidly fuelled consumer desire. The wood-bodied or 'Woody' station wagon (so named because the passenger compartment was made of wood) held particular cachet in the United States. As the custom wooden cab of the 1930s gave way to the all-steel body of the 1940s, the station wagon became less

[1] For a comprehensive treatment of American popular culture in the 1950s, and particularly for commentary on the 'golden age' of 'populism and popularity and luxury,' see Hine 1986.
[2] *House Beautiful*'s role as a cultural critic and tastemaker, in the context of this and other consumer 'lifestyle' or 'shelter' magazines, is fully explored in Penick Forthcoming, and Penick 2007.

expensive, easier to maintain and easy to mass produce.[3] By 1958, it had become the best-selling body style for many American automakers, including Ford, Plymouth, and Buick.[4]

In the 1950s, the station wagon became the automobile of choice not only for campers, hunters, surfers, but for the more affluent country-club set (including Clark Gable and President Dwight D. Eisenhower). It also became the car of choice for the Average American Family. In middle-class circles, the station wagon became a symbol of status and good taste. For many, it signalled the end of wartime rationing and the beginning of a postwar life with 'plenty of room for everything'.[5] In a subculture that was increasingly defined by affluence, the station wagon was the pinnacle of success and excess.[6]

The most popular station wagon models showcased the latest in convenience technology, displayed an exquisite fit and finish, and most importantly, radiated luxury. However, station wagon luxury was not just about refinement; it signalled the luxury of freedom and adventure (hinted at with model names such as the Chevrolet Nomad and the Pontiac Safari), and most importantly, the luxury of space. With its sheer size and evocative model names (for example, the Chevrolet Suburban Carryall and the Plymouth Suburban), the American station wagon suggested an expansive lifestyle in every sense.

Despite its indication of status, wealth and luxury, the station wagon seemed to embrace a new vision of postwar modernity, and a new set of postwar values. Station wagon modernity was stylish, yet economical. It remained sophisticated yet unself-conscious, and promoted a welcome escape from the rigours of haute culture. The station wagon became a companion to a relaxed, modern lifestyle built upon notions of tasteful practicality and chic informality. This was the symbol of the new postwar life of freedom, independence, and versatility.

[3] Early station wagons were costly: the 1941 Ford DeLuxe woody wagon was the first factory-built model to surpass the $1000 mark. By 1949, wood-bodied frames were replaced with all-steel cabs, and the wagon moved into mass-production. See Manning 1998.
[4] Initial production and sales of the station wagon were low, comprising only 1% of all automobile sales in 1940. By 1950, 3% of cars made and sold in the U.S. were station wagons, growing to 17% by the end of the decade. See Manning 1998.
[5] The slogan 'plenty of room for everything,' appears in a Ford advertisement in *House Beautiful,* June 1950. The ad declared that in a Ford station wagon, 'eight big people ride in comfort;' in a car that 'drives like a dream.'
[6] Possession of such a vehicle signalled economic well-being. Not only was the fully-optioned station wagon one of the most expensive car-types on the market (the 1957 Chevy Nomad, with a base price of $2,757, was more expensive than a Bel Air Convertible), but for many families, it was purchased as a second car.

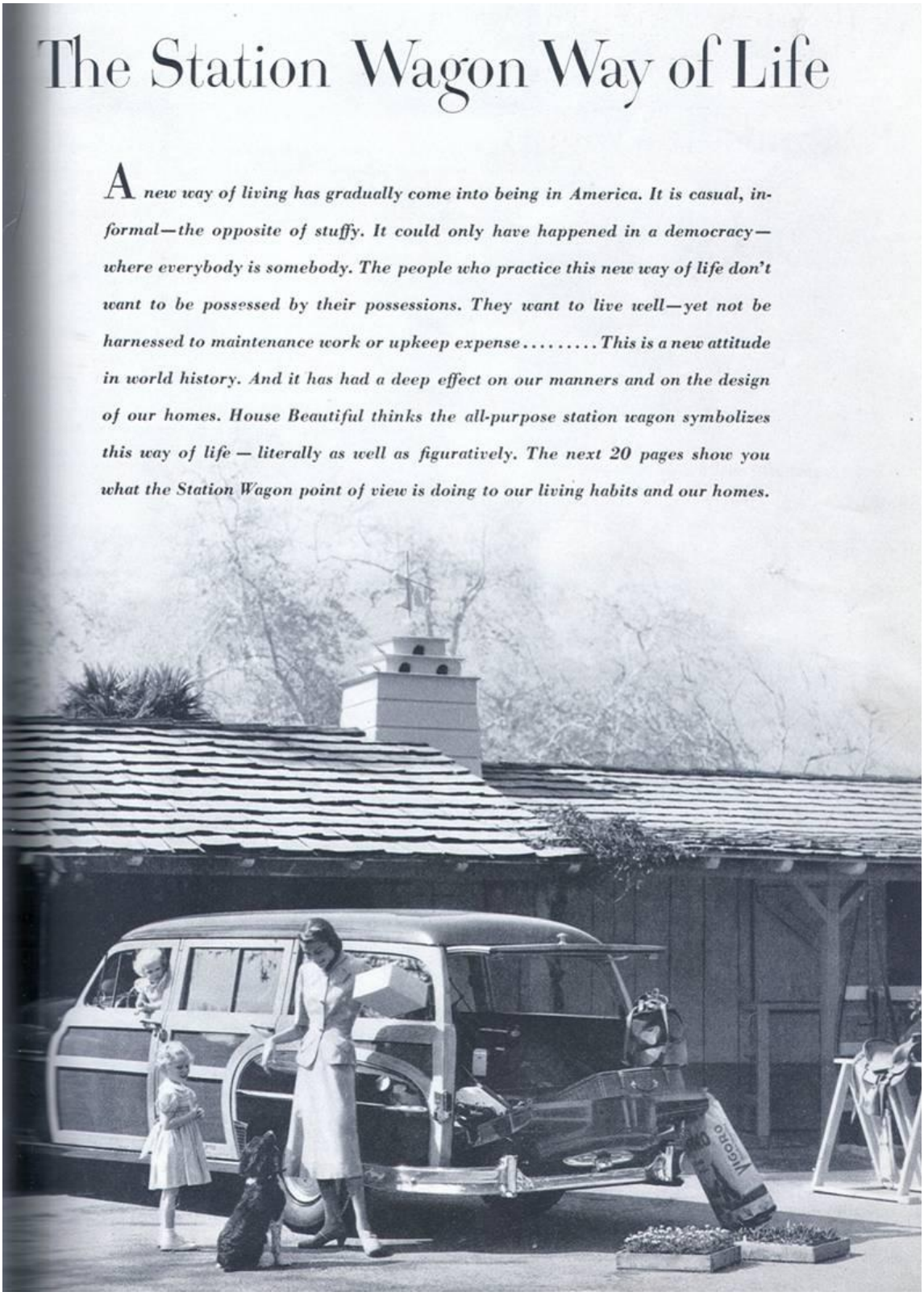

Fig. 1: Page layout for 'The Station Wagon Way of Life'. Pictured: The Cliff May family, at May's Ranch House Classic, Los Angeles. Photo Credit: John Engstead. In 'The Station Wagon Way of Life', *House Beautiful* 92 (June 1950): 103.

In June 1950, *House Beautiful* gave this new lifestyle a brand name: 'the Station Wagon Way of Life' [Fig. 1]. For families who had already adopted this way of life (but may not have known it by any such label) or for those who were eager to start living the life, *House Beautiful* defined its components. The Station Wagon Way of Life was guided by a particular philosophy of living; it relied upon discreet taste in cars, clothes, and domestic goods. Perhaps most importantly, the Station Wagon Life took place within the frame of American modern architecture.

House Beautiful had been promoting similar lifestyle concepts and modern design trends for nearly a decade, but in 1950, the magazine re-introduced these as a package deal with a new signature label. The staff, led by Editor-in-chief Elizabeth Gordon, had a specific strategy: *House Beautiful* would sell their concept with carefully composed images and pithy text. *House Beautiful* debuted 'The Station Wagon Way of Life' before the American public in a twenty-five page spread. The editor's introduction, kept to a short 128 words, was persuasive: Gordon (the anonymous but certain author of this piece) argued that 'a new way of living' had emerged – albeit gradually – in the United States.[7] The new life, the Station Wagon Way of Life, was 'casual, informal – the opposite of stuffy' ('Station Wagon Way of Life' 1950, 103). This was a new attitude, a new 'station wagon point of view' ('Station Wagon Way of Life' 1950, 103). *House Beautiful* believed that this point of view had already begun to alter American living habits. This attitude, so the magazine argued, had in turn affected consumer choice and therefore shaped domestic design. More specifically, this attitude impacted the design of the American single-family home. With the Station Wagon feature, *House Beautiful* sounded an alarm: a design revolution was fully underway, and the American Consumer – arriving on her trusty steed, or rather, in her trusty Station Wagon – was the new foot soldier.

House Beautiful's introductory text provided a hint of the philosophical underpinnings of the Station Wagon Way of Life, but the leading image revealed a larger, more complex story. [Fig. 1] This black and white photo, set in the Los Angeles suburbs, was shot by the noted Hollywood portrait photographer John Engstead.[8] The image is closely cropped; the centre of action is a mother, two children, and their dog, all gathered around a 1950 Chrysler station wagon. The car, loaded with a variety of goods, is parked in the driveway of the family's suburban home. The house is a backdrop, but not an afterthought. The setting was purposely selected by *House Beautiful*, and Engstead carefully

[7] The leading text for 'The station wagon way of life' appears on a single page with a featured image, as was typical of the magazine's method of introducing expansive articles; see 'Station wagon way of life, the' 1950. Elizabeth Gordon, *House Beautiful*'s editor in chief (1941-64), generally authored the introductory text. She also claimed to have written many stories that appeared in print with staff by-lines; see Gordon n.d.

[8] John Engstead (1912-84) was a well-known photographer who began his career in 1926, as an office boy at Paramount Studios. He became a studio portrait photographer, and by 1941, was working as a freelance photographer for advertisers and magazines. His work appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Collier's, Esquire, House Beautiful, Ladies Home Journal, Life, Look, Mademoiselle, McCall's, Vogue,* and *Woman's Home Companion*. He became noted for shooting his subjects (who included celebrities such as Bette Davis, Lauren Bacall, Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe and Lucille Ball) at their homes or outdoors. For Engstead's brief biography, see Motion Picture and Television Archive 2010.

retained hints of the dominant architectural style: this is a quintessential American Ranch House, designed by the 'father' of the ranch house, Cliff May.[9] The home's informal and sprawling character is central to the photographic image, and to the larger narrative of the Station Wagon lifestyle. The ranch house's one-story, low profile is clearly visible, and other key features remain in focus, such as the gently-pitched roof with exposed rafter ends, natural wood siding, wood shingles, and the central hearth-fireplace. The 'ranch' theme, a stereotypical indication of independent living in the American West, is carried from the architecture through the scene's props: a western-motif knapsack, a horse saddle, and the open stable door.

The *House Beautiful* image also indicates a central participant in the Station Wagon Way of Life: the suburban family. Yet, this image only captures part of the family, and the absence of the father is noteworthy. He is presumably away at the office, to which he drove in his sedan. Mother has stayed behind with the children and her station wagon, to assume her role as household manager, caretaker, chauffeur, cook, butler, maid, and gardener.[10]

This image, and the way of life it depicts, indicates both an economic and social shift in postwar America. The underlying economic assumption is that the family pictured here (and millions of 'average families' like them) could afford to purchase not just one car, but two. And the second car, the large Chrysler Station Wagon, suggests that the postwar mother, no longer at work to support the war effort, assumed an enormous domestic load that required an enormous domestic automobile.[11] Her expanding role is glimpsed in this scene: she unloads the station wagon (without assistance from a male figure or domestic help), which had been packed full with a western-themed knapsack, a picnic basket, flowers, a cake box, a sack of Vigoro plant food, and a powered lawn trimmer. The possibilities for the remainder of the car's contents may be inferred, or particularly suggested, by surrounding advertisements within the magazine: the station wagon contains ample cargo space to hold perhaps a new BBQ grill, or enough processed food to fill a walk-in freezer. The scene that comes into focus is not only a statement about a lifestyle, but about the 'New Woman' of 1950. She is the Station Wagon Wife who runs about town fetching groceries, landscaping supplies, picnic lunches, and cake – while stylishly dressed in her Adrian suit and heels.[12]

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[9] For a history of Cliff May and the American ranch house, see Gregory 2008. May's career, particularly his involvement with *House Beautiful*, is further explored in Penick 2007.

[10] For more on the role of women and mothers in the immediate postwar years, see Cowan 1983; Friedan 1963; and May 2008.

[11] In 1940, 5% of the American workforce was female. Cowan (1983, 208) argues that indeed many of the working women in those years were those less likely to afford amenities and labor-saving devices, and many went to work so as to afford these symbols of affluence. She further establishes that in the first decades after World War II, the American economy shifted from production to service and from manufacture to communications, thus opening up large number of jobs for which women were considered appropriate: typists, receptionists, waitresses, and nurses; see Cowan 1983, 202.

[12] It was no mistake that the Station Wagon woman was wearing designer clothes by Adrian. In the 1940s, New York rivalled Paris in the world of international fashion; Los Angeles, and Hollywood in particular, quickly

The essence of the Station Wagon Way of Life is revealed through this singular photograph, with the focus turned toward the characters, the setting, and the props. Yet *House Beautiful*'s promotional strategy contained another crucial component: the checklist. On the page that followed the Station Wagon image, the reader (not to be left to her own interpretive devices) was given a concise definition of The Station Wagon Way of Life in thirteen points. This segment fully provided the key concepts and the all-important 'buzz words' that defined Station Wagon living ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104).

When viewed in concert with the feature images, *House Beautiful*'s thirteen-point list clarifies that the Station Wagon Life was, first and foremost, a 'point of view - about the relation of one's self to other people, about what is important in life' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). *House Beautiful*'s statement concerns social values; the implicit criticism is of those who are perhaps more pretentious, more concerned about social status, or who are 'possessed by their possessions' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). The Station Wagon set, as *House Beautiful* indicated, conversely embraced a manner of living that was 'never showy or ostentatious,' luxurious yet understated, and completely opposed to 'conspicuous waste, which was once so stylish' ('What is the station wagon way of life?' 1950, 104). With this line from the magazine, an analogy with the station wagon automobile becomes clear.

As with the opening photograph, *House Beautiful*'s Station Wagon Way of Life list demonstrates a particular emphasis on family, stating clearly that 'we, the family, matter most' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). The kinds of social and leisure activities, in which the Station Wagon family might engage, are all specifically that: family-oriented. For *House Beautiful*, the Station Wagon life was essentially suburban, where 'pleasures' included entertaining at home (rather than in clubs or hotels), gardening, and 'having children…romping with pets…enjoying sports…living outdoors whenever possible' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). The final point included on the Station Wagon list is perhaps the most significant: *House Beautiful* wrote that Station Wagon families 'have molded their manners and habits to suit themselves – instead of copying bygone ones form their ancestors' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). Because of this new self-direction and independence, to follow *House Beautiful*'s logic, Station Wagon families exerted a tremendous influence in shaping postwar design trends, in large part through their purchasing decisions and requirements. For, as the magazine argued, 'new manners always produce new modes' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). These

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challenged the east coast trend setters. Gilbert Adrian (1903-1959), who was head of costume design at MGM studios from 1928 to 1941, became one of Hollywood's most influential designers. In 1941, he retired from MGM and introduced Adrian. Ltd. in Beverly Hills. At his shop, and through select retailers, he offered both custom and ready-to-wear clothes (including his famous Victory suit, which adhered to government restrictions on clothing manufacture). Though Adrian's designs were high fashion, he was noted for his use of everyday materials, including gingham for tailored suits; this made his suit particularly appropriate for the Station Wagon woman pictured in the *House Beautiful* feature. For a history of Adrian, see Esquevin 2008.

new modes, interpreted as design modes or styles, are showcased throughout the rest of *House Beautiful*'s Station Wagon feature. The magazine accessorized the Station Wagon life, with consumer goods artfully presented to underscore primary themes: living easy in the out of doors with the help of efficient wheeled carts and 'accessories that do the work' (in 'Station Wagon families make eating outdoors easy'); filling life with trouble-free ingredients in the form of low-maintenance floor coverings, practical patterns, and hardy fabrics like gingham, plastics and nylon (in 'The Station Wagon set wants the effect without the work'); appreciating and cultivating nature, or gardening without fuss (in 'The Station Wagon set wants the effect without the work'); and adopting new planning devices or technologies that brought ease to domestic life – everything from the compact assembly-line kitchen plan, to engineered work spaces, to Hotpoint Disposals, Hotpoint Dishwashers, and Armstrong linoleum counters (in 'Station Wagon Living revolves around the kitchen') (see 'Station Wagon families make eating outdoors easy,' 1950, 110; Little 1950; Howland 1950; and Conway 1950).

can tell a station wagon family
its house and furniture

A room where you can dine in casual intimacy with the outdoors underlines the naturalness of station wagon living. Exposed beams in the sloped ceiling frankly reveal the structure of this unaffected house by Cliff May, while the furniture is a subtle blend of luxury with great practicality. Paul Frankl designs from Johnson Furniture Co.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAYNARD PARKER

Fig. 2: Page layout for article 'What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' Pictured: Paul Frankl designs for Johnson Furniture Co., at May's Ranch House Classic, Los Angeles. Photo credit: Maynard Parker. In What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' *House Beautiful* 92 (June 1950): 105.

House Beautiful's argument that new lifestyle manners produce new design modes applied equally to furniture. Perhaps the most striking new mode to be displayed in *House Beautiful* was Paul T. Frankl's line of furnishings, which according to the magazine's captions, were directly inspired by Station Wagon Living. In 1949, Barry Stuart of the Johnson Furniture Company in Grand Rapids commissioned Frankl, a distinguished modern designer working out of Los Angeles, to design two complete furniture lines for the company. The market for Johnson Furniture Company, and thus for Frankl, was the conservative American middle-class – the same market targeted in *House Beautiful*'s Station Wagon feature.[13] Frankl's first pieces, which premiered in 1950, belonged to the 'Debonaire Group,' and were featured in the dining room of Station Wagon house [Fig.2]. The presence of Frankl's Debonaire Group defined a 'station wagon family,' who, as the magazine argued, 'you could always tell…by its house and furniture' ('You can tell a Station Wagon family…' 1950, 105).

The backdrop for *House Beautiful*'s photograph of the Debonaire Group is the dining room within the ranch house featured in the introductory image: designer Cliff May's home off of Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. The focal point is Frankl's Debonaire dining table, executed in wormy chestnut with a white cork top, a modest material finished to resemble imported marble. This dining table is comprised of two small side tables pushed together to form a larger unit, a point of flexibility intended to demonstrate an important facet of Station Wagon accessories: 'luxury with great practicality' ('You can tell a Station Wagon family…' 1950, 105). The serving buffet (pictured right), is another key element, executed in mahogany and maple with an Old Briar finish and a corresponding white cork top. Frankl's perfectly corresponding pieces lend a sense of weight and refinement to this ranch house interior and provide a perfect juxtaposition to the home's simple materials, informal spaces, and transparent envelope.

The Debonaire dining room was the pinnacle of understated or 'unaffected' elegance, but the master bedroom was the centrepiece of the Station Wagon house [Fig. 3]. The bedroom was furnished with Frankl's Station Wagon Group, also produced in 1950 for Johnson Furniture. *House Beautiful* described the set as 'tailored furniture in a classic station wagon combination' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 106). The material is mahogany with light wood trim, highlighted with leather pulls set in brass mountings. *House Beautiful's* text draws the reader's attention not only toward the quality, substance and weight of Frankl's pieces, but to the presence of luxury materials put to practical use. A particular selling point here is the lack of 'fussy decoration' and 'perishable materials.' As consistent with *House Beautiful*'s Station Wagon concept, Frankl's furniture suggested versatility, and 'unsuspected conveniences.'

[13] For more on Frankl and his designs for Johnson Furniture Company, see Long 2007.

Fig. 3: Paul T. Frankl, Station Wagon Group, pictured in the Station Wagon House (designer: Cliff May), in 'What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' *House Beautiful* 92 (June 1950). Photo: Maynard L. Parker. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. PhotCL MLP 1410(005) Photo from Maynard Parker Collection.

House Beautiful's images, shot by California photographer Maynard L. Parker, capture the signature qualities of Frankl's furniture pieces, but the importance of the architecture as frame remains paramount. Furniture is thus contextualized, and the images contain important bits of information about the architectural environment. The 'trouble-free' natural cork floor, the low roof, and the exposed rafters were all key elements of and ranch house architecture – and the Station Wagon style.

The photographs of Frankl furnishings are framed in such a way that the piece is the centre of attention, but the images convey an architectural story. Here, the relationship between interior and exterior spaces is illustrated, specifically the free relationship between the two that was conducive to informal Station Wagon living (and a quintessential characteristic of the postwar American ranch house, and signature design feature of all Cliff May's work).

The impact of *House Beautiful*'s editorial choices – specifically the composition imposed by the photographer, and the layout designs – becomes clear when comparing the *House Beautiful* Station Wagon spread with Johnson Furniture's own marketing brochure for the same furniture lines. Johnson published a small booklet dating from 1950 in which the company presented Frankl's Debonaire and the Station Wagon Groups together, just as *House Beautiful* had done.

House Beautiful and Johnson Furniture clearly possessed dichotomous marketing approaches. This becomes particularly evident through the text provided by Johnson Furniture: 'Here are two distinctive groups of an entirely new kind of modern –for those who are at their best in smart Town and Country fashions – for those who like to feel the wheel of a sleek convertible or Station Wagon – for those who are at home in a ranch house or a penthouse apartment…it is a modern that reflects the contemporary American pace for casual living….' ('Presenting designs by Paul T. Frankl' 1950). With specific reference to the Station Wagon Group, the Johnson brochure states: 'Paul Frankl has designed the Station Wagon Group for zestful living in town or country. It is furniture for the young in heart, for the American tempo of gay, cheerful, convenient living….' The group is described as 'solid comfort' with the 'casual smartness of the Station Wagon design' ('Presenting designs by Paul T. Frankl' 1950).

While Johnson Furniture's text may recall *House Beautiful*'s own captions, the visual presentation is markedly different. The Johnson images are black and white; the richness and contrast of Frankl's chosen materials are lost. The smaller pieces appear as cut-outs, and lose the compliment of the architectural frame that the *House Beautiful* feature provided. While Johnson's images still perhaps vaguely suggest the stunning aesthetic of the furniture, and while the Johnson text is catchy, the company's brochure as a whole is lacklustre. There is certainly no sense, as with the *House Beautiful* feature article, of the Station Wagon family who might purchase Frankl's furniture group.

In his monograph on Frankl (2007), architectural historian Christopher Long has suggested that *House Beautiful* arranged the 'Station Wagon Way of Life' feature to help launch Frankl's new line of furnishings; this was clearly a small part of the magazine's motivation. Both Cliff May, and by association, Frankl, were friends of *House Beautiful* and particular of Elizabeth Gordon. May was a contributing consultant and building editor at the magazine, and his 1948 home had been named *House Beautiful's* first Pace Setter House.[14] There is little doubt that Cliff May influenced the creation of the Station Wagon feature, and that the selection of accessories was determined by a personal connection. Yet there is in fact a more complex interpretation of the feature: Frankl's pieces, set in May's ranch house, within the Station Wagon concept, were part of a larger editorial agenda that for *House Beautiful* lasted nearly twenty-five years.

Station Wagon Living and the American Style

House Beautiful's concept of Station Wagon Living depended a great deal on architecture as the framework for life, and on the stage set first glimpsed in the feature's opening image. The setting of May's ranch house, and more specifically, the kind of modern design that the house represents, indicate the magazine's larger agenda. In *House Beautiful*'s thirteen-point guide to the Station Wagon Way of Life, the magazine posits that Station Wagon families 'have been a big influence in shaping the emerging American Style. Actually, the Station Wagon Way of Life is one of the *causes* behind the emergence of the American Style' ('What is the Station Wagon Way of Life?' 1950, 104). But what was the American Style?

In May 1950, just one month prior to introducing the Station Wagon Way of Life, *House Beautiful*'s Elizabeth Gordon announced the maturation of a new brand of modern architecture: the American Style.[15] In a full-colour feature, complete with a nine-point list, *House Beautiful* presented the American Style as a cohesive set of design principles with its own representative architects and designers. Its direct lineage was home-grown and indigenous. It descended from H.H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernard Maybeck and Greene & Greene, to mid-century practitioners such as William Wurster, Harwell Harris, Anshen & Allen, and Cliff May.[16]

As *House Beautiful* established, the design priorities for the American Style focused upon practical functionality and regional responsiveness. These specifically required a consideration of purpose and site, honest use of materials,

[14] For a discussion of *House Beautiful's* annual Pace Setter House program, to which Cliff May contributed, see Penick 2007.
[15] For the announcement of the arrival of the American Style, see Gordon 1950, 123. For the Nine Points of American Style, see 'How to recognize the American Style,' 1950: 158. For a full discussion of The American Style, see Penick 2007 and Penick 2011.
[16] *House Beautiful* articles 'America did it first' (1946) and 'The best modern architecture has its roots in our own soil' (1946) established the pedigree and quality of American architecture, while 'The most influential design source of the last fifty years' (1946) and 'One man's house' (1946) specifically celebrated the achievements of Wright.

frank expression of structure, and the use of integrated rather than superfluous ornament. This certainly recalled tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement (in both England and the United States), and of Frank Lloyd Wright's theories of organic design. *House Beautiful's* nine points, if not quite a manifesto, read as a compilation or 'greatest hits' of modern architectural theory, with a particular humanistic inflection. Perhaps most important, the American Style, as presented by Gordon, was neither esoteric nor dogmatic but rather a 'common-sense' modern architecture. The American Style was, of course, synonymous with the designed components of the Station Wagon Way of Life. Station Wagon Living was, then, simply a branded extension of the architectural ideas already present in *House Beautiful*'s concept of the American Style.

The American Style– much like the Station Wagon Way of Life that reportedly caused it – was a powerful label. It included not only an aesthetic argument and a lifestyle component, but incorporated issues of modern character and national identity. In a time when the United States was establishing a global political and economic presence, *House Beautiful* argued that the nation should also strive for cultural and artistic autonomy. This included architecture. The American Style, as posited by the magazine, was a 'cultural declaration of independence' from any foreign artistic influence (Bangs 1950, 138). More to the point, as the magazine would posit, the American Style was a direct challenge to the International Style, a competing line of modern architecture with roots in 1920s Europe, which was, at that very moment, experiencing a dramatic rise in popularity in the United States.

As the 1950s progressed, *House Beautiful* (with Gordon still at the helm) increasingly linked the American Style to a larger political, cultural and social battle, a perceived national identity crisis, and a fight against an intruding sense of 'other.' What had commenced in the pages of *House Beautiful* as a campaign for lifestyle took on nationalistic overtones; for *House Beautiful*, the American Style and the seemingly innocuous Station Wagon Way of Life became highly-politicized weapons in an attack not only against the International Style and its practitioners (including architects Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius), but against communism, socialism, and any form of non-democratic, non-capitalistic government, economic system or culture. And so the magazine's larger agenda emerges: The Station Wagon Way of life was not simply a marketing strategy; it was a carefully designed architectural and cultural message.

In 1950, with *House Beautiful*'s first announcement of the American Style and the subsequent branding of The Station Wagon Way of Life, the magazine began to play a critical role not only as a mechanism for marketing and a vehicle for sales promotion, but as a cultural critic and tastemaker. *House Beautiful* wanted to promote a certain image of American modernity, bolstered by the American Station Wagon and the American Ranch House. The Station Wagon Way of Life, as a singular feature in one issue of the magazine, was intended as a supplementary explanation of a much larger concept, something far greater than an advertisement that favoured certain designers, featured prominent advertisers, or privileged select consumer desires. The featured Station Wagon image

underscored another broad implication: it positioned the Average American, specifically the female consumer (the Station Wagon Woman), as a powerful player in the postwar design discourse. There was, yet still, a larger agenda at *House Beautiful*, one that placed design at the complex nexus of consumer economics, architectural culture, and Cold War politics. *House Beautiful* functioned not only as a shelter magazine or a domestic look book, or a catalogue from which to shop for ideas and goods, but as a conveyor of social and cultural values.[17] *House Beautiful*'s goal was not just to market a certain brand of modernism, or to shape taste merely for consumption (or to please the magazine's advertisers). The magazine's goal was to profoundly shape American culture toward a new modernity, a Station Wagon Way of Life.

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[17] The term 'shelter' magazine is used to refer to a periodical publication – popular or consumer-oriented – with a focus on residential architecture, interior design, decorative arts (including home furnishings), and in some instances, landscape and gardening. The intended audience for shelter magazines was often female, and in many cases, middle to upper class. Though shelter magazines specifically focused on design, these were not written for professional architects or designers. *House Beautiful* was among this genre of publication, which included, for example, *Better Homes and Gardens, House and Home, Home and Garden,* and, to some extent, *Sunset Magazine.*

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