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Celebrating 175: Florence Knoll Bassett, Letters (1960s), 1961-1968

Extracted on Apr-23-2024 01:58:43

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prologue

Shu courageously took responsibility for the entire business which continued to grow on the foundations she had built with Hans. The company flourished, and in its time, there was no more prestigious interior design firm anywhere than Florence Knoll's Planning Unit. In 1961 she was awarded the Industrial Arts Medal of the American Institute of Architects, sharing the honors with Le Corbusier who received the Institute's Gold Medal. Her citation read in part: "Your training, skill and unfailing good judgment have written your name high on the roll of masters of our contemporary design." Five years later, after completing which is considered to be her master work, interior design of Eero Saarinen's CBS headquarters in New York City, she retired to live in Miami and Vermont with Hood Bassett whom she had married in 1958. The timing of her departure was perfect if lamented by her clients, colleagues and friends in New York and other places. Not only was the CBS tower a professional tour de force it was a beautiful parting gesture, and significantly, a symbolic noblesse oblige tribute to her long association with the Saarinen family.

Shu was a dynamic force in the establishment of interior design (opposed to interior decoration) as an accepted profession. An architect by training and by instinct, she pioneered the use of the architectural principles of scale, proportion and analysis in the design of space and of furniture. Her interiors were always integrated with the building architecture, and she was among the first to commission contemporary works of art and the encourage (and frequently to educate) her client to collect the

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