

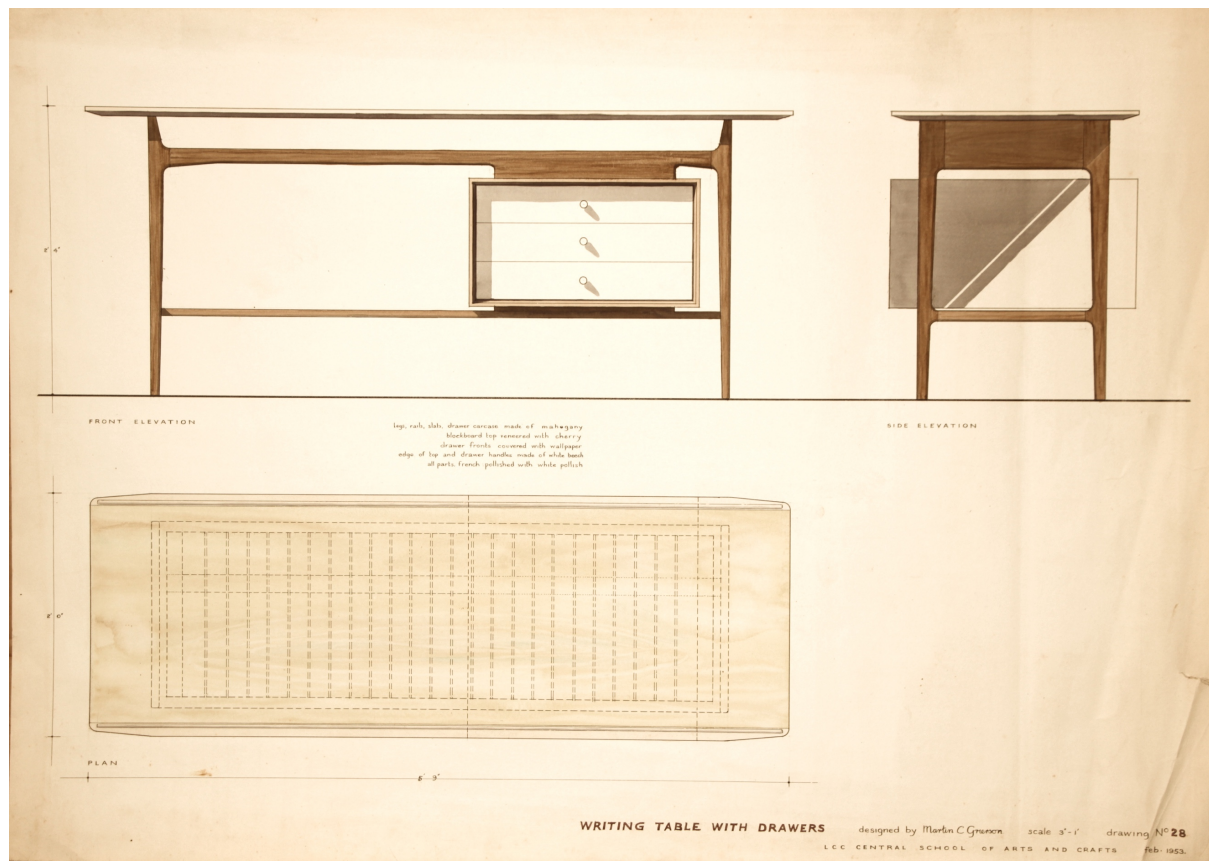
LCC Central School of Arts & Crafts – 1949 to 1953 Bro. Martin Grierson



I went to The Central in 1949 when it was largely one of the top European Art Schools, under the shield of the LCC but allowed to be run independently. This, unlike today, allowed the school to be run in the tradition of William Lethaby, its founder and first Principle, and to award its own Diploma, (*Well recognised throughout the world*). The principle on which the school was founded was that teaching of design would be taught entirely by visiting part time, practicing leading artists and designers of the day. The Crafts were taught by full time fine craftsmen and women supported by very well-equipped workshops. To satisfy the LCC the workshops took in day release students from industry, presumably apprentices. Because this activity was supporting the various industries, those industries supported the college with machines and equipment as found in the industries.

The Central was the equivalent to a post graduate school, offering a 3 year course in each subject, to students who had done 1 - 2 years in a local art school first. I, at the very young age of 16, was accepted through influence by my father who had taught at Camberwell when William Johnstone had been Principle there and was now head of

the Central. I was accepted to do one year in several departments first, followed by the three-year course in furniture and interior design. You can imagine my blushes when on the first day I was introduced to the Life class and all eyes seemed to be overtly looking at me.



In this first year I did life drawing and painting with tutors such as Maurice Kessleman, William Roberts, Anthony Gross, McKinnon and several others. Basic design with Jessie Collins in Graphics department, (*where I got to know fellow students, Ken Garland, Ivor Kamlisch, Alan Fletcher, Colin Forbs, Gill, and others who later became famous*). I did time in Furniture and Interior design and in the furniture workshop, also some time in the metal workshop.

My three-year course was in Furniture and Interior Design - strictly speaking two courses, but I managed to do both at the same time. The head of department was F L Marcus, (*who I believe had studied at The Bauhaus*). My principle tutors were Nigel Walters, Clive Latimer, Frank Austin, and in Interior Design Trevor Dannatt, Jaques Groag, among others.

During this period, after the war, there were many overseas students learning some trade or profession for their future. We had six Poles, others from India, Egypt,

Greece, and S Africa. Years later, when visiting Egypt on a DIA design trip, I met the head of design course at Cairo Art College who had been a fellow student.

The period was during the build-up and opening of *The Festival of Britain* and several of my tutors were involved in design there. During the holidays I worked for some of them on working drawings for the Festival, which felt very important. The fact that all the people teaching me were leading designers of the day gave me a very practical idea of what design was. And I loved the 'hands on' opportunity of making my pieces in the workshops, making adjustments as they came together, and seeing how the designs turned out. I also made models of most of the pieces I designed.



Some 18 years after I left, I decided to open a workshop to change from being an industrial designer to becoming a Designer Maker, and I found that I knew, and had experienced, every technique and knowledge that I needed from my student days.

The old central building in Southampton Row, which was purpose built for the college by the LCC Architects Department, was a very suitable kind of building. Everyone, students, staff, and visitors, as they circulated through the building were made very aware of all the work and ideas going on. Some departments, furniture & interior design especially, were an open part of the circulation meaning that you had

to walk through the studios and workshops to get from one end to the other. Corridors passing every department would be lined with work in hand. Exhibitions would be held in the grand 'Lethaby hall' by the entrance.

I feel very lucky to have been a student at that time when the school was left to be independent and run in the spirit of the Arts & Crafts movement and our Art Workers' Guild. I find the present scene rather depressing, but that is another subject.

