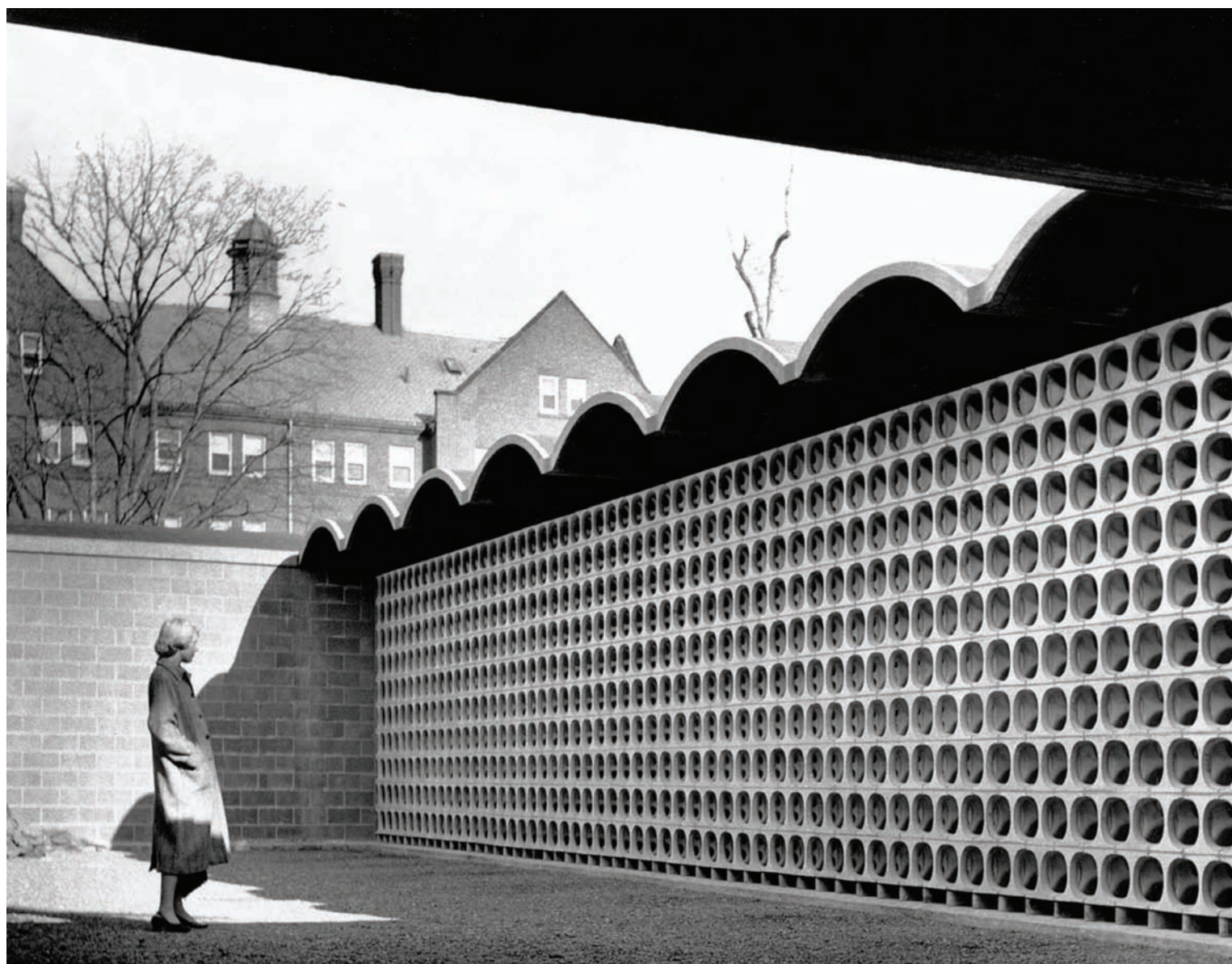


Architects Paul Schweikher and Winston Elting installed an expanse of sculptor Erwin Hauer's cast-stone Design 5 at Chicago Hall, dedicated in 1959 at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York; OPPOSITE TOP: Created in 1954, a prototype for Design 4, Hauer's foray into solid geometry, lacked alternating connectors between the near and far grid; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Hauer photographed with Nexus A-2, from his mid-1990s Nexus series, in his Bethany, Connecticut, studio in 2003.

Infinite Possibilities



THE WORK OF ERWIN HAUER

MAJESTIC, DRAMATIC, FUNCTIONAL, and thoroughly modern, the architectural screens and walls created by Austrian-born sculptor Erwin Hauer resemble bleached dinosaur bones when disconnected and weaved strips of stone when assembled. Patterns appear and disappear in a kaleidoscopic interplay of light and shadow. After a long moment in the spotlight, Hauer's work was lost in the darkness, seemingly forgotten. The publication of his book, *Continua: Architectural Screens and Walls* (Princeton Architectural Press) in 2004, illuminated it once again.

In 1955 when Hauer, then age 29, arrived to do postgraduate study at Rhode Island School of Design on a Fullbright Grant, he had already established himself as a sculptor in his native Vienna. As Hauer describes in the book, his fascination with continuity and potential infinity, his studies of biomorphic form, and encounters with the work of sculptor Henry Moore all informed the series of 11 sculptures he created between 1950 and 1959 which he called "Continua" in honor of their "continuous surface."

In Hauer's hands, the convex and concave "saddle surfaces" that smoothly combined in Moore's work, became repetitive patterns that were, as he says in the book, "resistant to closure." Containing what he called "the seed of infinite expansion," the 3-D pieces made of cement, concrete, or plastic could only reach completion when they were joined to "replicas of themselves." Once united, the results were clean-lined perforated walls and screens both decorative and distinctive, a very modern means with which to obscure light as well as disperse it inside or out.

Hauer's art evolved from sculptural study to architectural practicality in 1954 when he added the ability to incorporate glass into some of the screens for use as exterior walls and developed some of them to act as load-bearing walls. That same year, as his sculpture was published in books and magazines, he obtained patents on his work in several countries including the United States. Once in the U.S, he was sought

Text Nina Korman

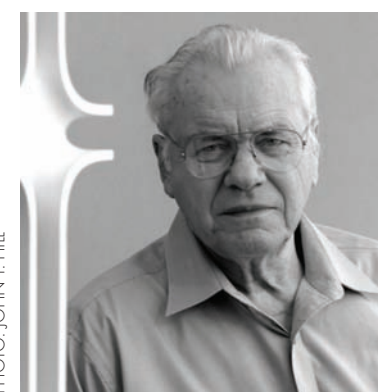


PHOTO: JOHN T. HILL

out to collaborate with noted architects and designers like Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, and Knoll. Unable to keep up with the large-scale demand for his work, Hauer licensed its worldwide production and marketing to Murals Incorporated.

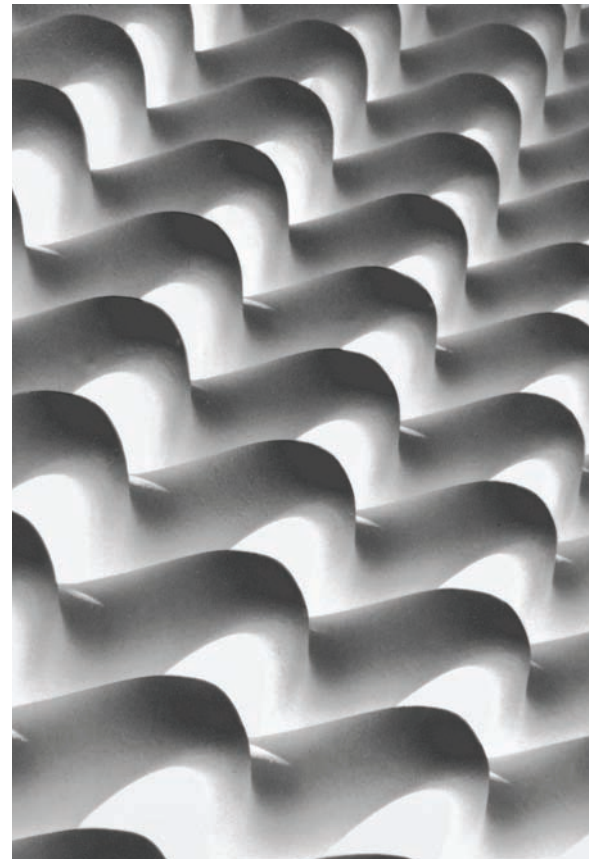
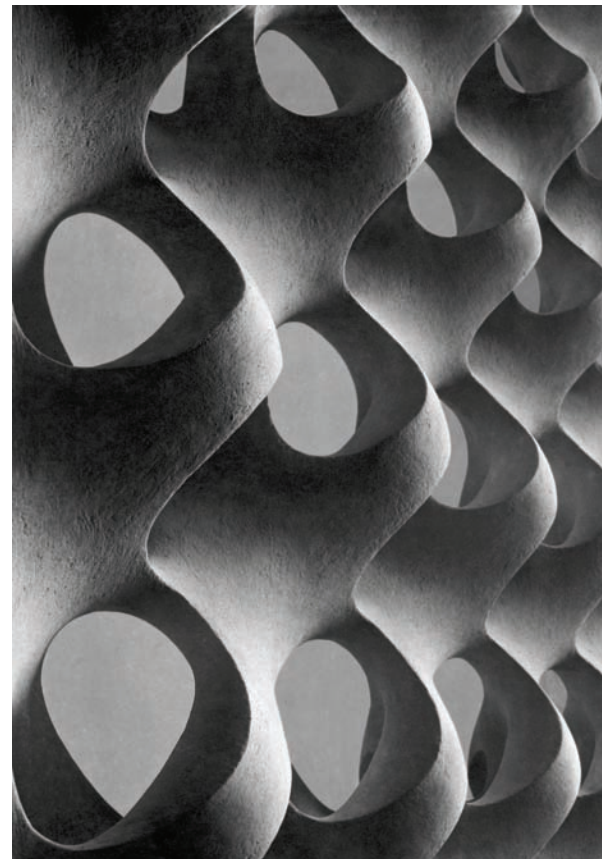
By 1956 while Hauer did a year of postgraduate study at Yale University under artist and former Bauhaus professor Josef Albers (who soon invited him to join the faculty at Yale's School of Art), his screens and walls continued to gain popularity. Design 1 and 5 were installed as room dividers in Knoll International's Mexico City showroom and in the New York City headquarters of *Look* magazine, respectively. Design 5 offered a striking backdrop to an endless row of teller windows inside the First National Bank of Miami. And Design 10 covered part of the Coca-Cola Pavilion's exterior at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

While at Yale, where Hauer taught until 1990, he re-evaluated his "Continua" series and came to the conclusion that "infinity is not really for mortals after all." Although the "great circle" had been a recurring motif in Hauer's designs, in his "Intercircles" of 1957 he already purposely limited the number of repetitions because, as he said in the book, "nothing new was to be learned from further additions."

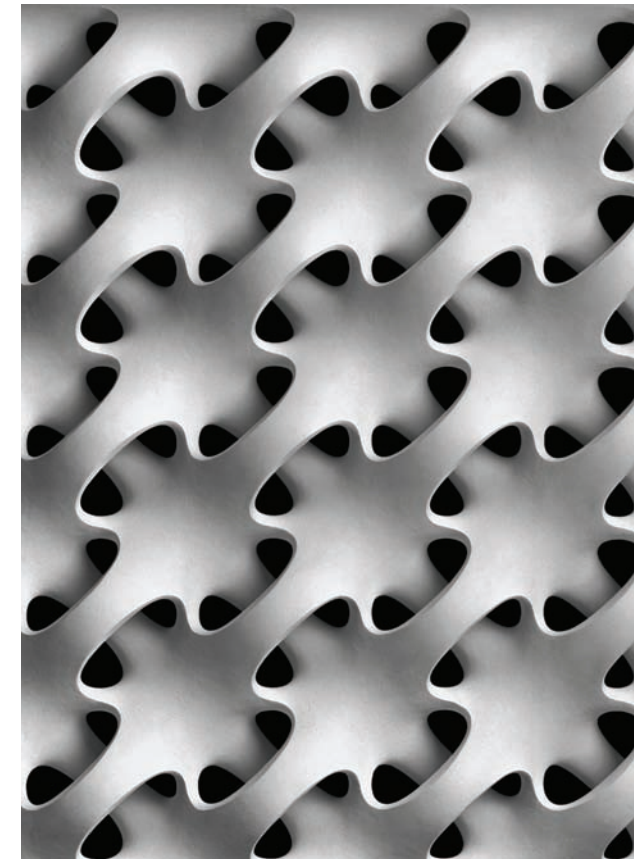
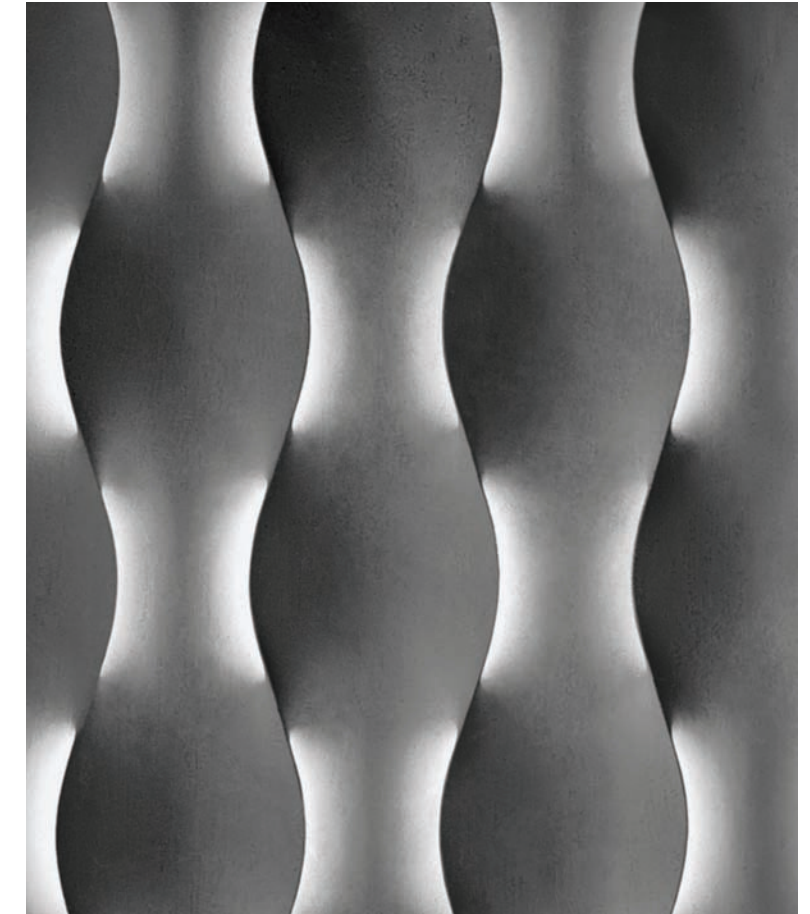
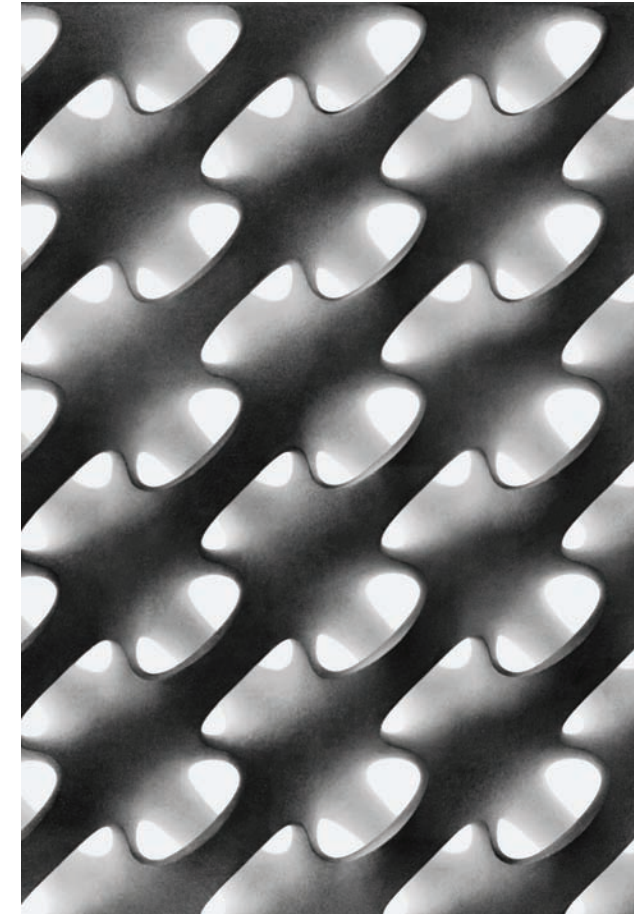
Hauer's sculpture evolved, embracing more organic and realistic forms. Then the 2004 publishing of his book sparked a renewed appreciation for the 80-year-old artist's work. Commissions for screens began. By the summer of 2005, Erwin Hauer Studios was formed. The screens, prohibitively expensive to produce using old methods, were re-vitalized through digital technology and production methods thanks to the computer smarts of former Hauer students Enrique Rosado and Gregory Spiggle (the latter no longer a partner in the company). Several older designs, some slightly modified, have been regenerated, and a new one (212) was added. While digital technology has made the creation of shapes less labor-intensive, finding the perfect material in which to realize the work is still a struggle.

Nonetheless the newer "Continua" work debuted this past May at New York City's International Contemporary Furniture Fair and was featured at the Knoll booth at Chicago's NeoCon show this summer. Recently architect Philip Koether—a former Hauer student who is designing the interiors of the Centria, a luxury condominium being built adjacent to Rockefeller Center—commissioned a 25-foot limestone bas-relief (based on digitized work) for installation in the lobby.

Hauer spoke with *HOME Miami* recently about his work.



CLOCKWISE FROM NEAR RIGHT: Design 1 lit from the back; Created to provide subtle illumination for a wall in a house of worship, Design 6, a complete departure from its predecessors, was "a totally spontaneous notion" says Hauer; A front-lit Design 1 emphasizes the screens' kaleidoscopic quality; Architect Robert Kramreiter utilized Design 3, which Hauer calls his "most luminous" design, as a light-diffusing wall in a Vienna, Austria, church; A close-up view of Design 1, the first of Hauer's "Continua" series, created in 1950.



HOME FORT LAUDERDALE: With the "Continua" series, from 1950 to 1959, were you producing about one design a year?

ERWIN HAUER: The first three years, I produced four designs, and then one was modified. At that time some market demand arose and that demanded that I also work on the means of producing it, so others could produce it too.

HOME: Talk about materials, the screens and walls have been realized in concrete, Hydrostone, and acrylic resin—do you have a favorite?

E.H.: Hydrostone is a very very high-strength gypsum cement. It's readily cast, and it is not for long-term outdoor exposure. Concrete, I call it 'cast stone,' is a mixture of more carefully selected ingredients and metaphysical properties than what is generally hauled around in those big trucks. That is better for outdoor exposure, but for casting, it's a little more difficult to finish. Acrylic resin is one of the best contemporary plastics. For the first application of it, which was a light-diffusing ceiling, it had to be transparent, and at the time in 1960, the mold to produce those ceiling panels cost \$24,000, that's like \$100,000 now. I'm a pretty practical person and I'm on the side of the engineer. Whatever the situation requires, we try to optimize the use of that material.

HOME: How did you come to work with Knoll in the late 1950s? Was Florence Knoll a fan?

E.H.: A painting graduate student of Albers was hired to work for the Knoll interior unit to work on their color choices, and he became influential in their textile department. He introduced my walls to the head designer and maybe to Florence Knoll. But I never met Florence. Basically the business was transacted through Murals Incorporated. The Knoll people were marvelous as far as the various trades. They had a team of enforcers that they sent to inspect the product. They came to the casting floor and the construction site while the tile setters were building the walls, and they wouldn't let anybody get away with any shortcuts.

HOME: *Your Design 5 was used in the First National Bank of Miami, which was owned by Florence Knoll's second husband, Harry Hood Bassett, and had interiors by Knoll. Where there any other sites that utilized your work in Miami?*

TOP RIGHT: Several modules of Design 3 await assembly in early 1950s Vienna, Austria; **BOTTOM:** Design 1, with its recurring circles, acted as a room divider at the Knoll International showroom in Mexico City, 1961; **BELOW LEFT:** In 1959, Design 5 stretched behind the teller area at the First National Bank of Miami, which occupied an entire downtown block.



E.H.: There was a hotel. Morris Lapidus bought a number of things. He was not one of my favorite users. He got a little credit recently for his exuberant Bronx Baroque style. He'd put things next to each other in what seemed to be a fairly indiscriminating way. I liked the austerity of the Knoll environment.

HOME: *Who were some of your favorite "users?"*

E.H.: Schweikher and Elting did a nice job at Vassar College. I didn't get to see too many of the installations. I would have had to travel the country. I had other things to do!

HOME: *So you weren't aware of who was buying: Could you have been driving around, come upon a building, and suddenly find your work?*

E.H.: Exactly. It became a commodity.

HOME: *What happened between your retirement in 1990 and the publication of the book in 2004?*

E.H.: I had to return to [making art based on] the human figure. That was a need I felt. I had to have something on which I could work from which I got an immediate feedback. With the screens there's a lot of production time. By the time you see it, you have invested a lot of time and you can't take much of it back if you don't like what you see.

HOME: *What got you to the point of saying "infinity is not really for mortals after all?"*

E.H.: The notion that although it's possible to produce acres of the stuff, it is not really to the advantage of the design because after a while when you get too many repeats of the motif, you tune out the motif and you surrender to the pattern. And then it becomes yard goods. ■