

FLORENCE KNOLL SOFA

Brainchild of a maverick designer, this lounge was the backbone of *Mad Men*'s set design – and remains a picture of sleek modernity.

When the ad execs on *Mad Men* were chain-smoking Lucky Strikes, downing their pre-lunch drinks and perpetrating some casual workplace sexual harassment, a Florence Knoll sofa witnessed it all. The social customs of the 1960s may have been dubious but the interior stylings were impeccable: when the TV series premiered in 2007, it inspired a renewed swooning over all things Mid-century Modern, including the iconic sofa design that sat in the Sterling Cooper lobby for four seasons.

The piece was the 1954 creation of pioneer architect and designer Florence Knoll, who was a protégé of one-time Bauhaus director Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – the Peggy Olson, if you will, to his Don Draper. She joined the Knoll furniture company in New York in 1941 and married its founder, Hans Knoll, in 1946. During the post-war boom, when skyscrapers were multiplying across the country, Florence defined the look of American offices with her insistence that contemporary architecture needed sleek, open-plan interiors to match.

A creative powerhouse with a rare seat at the table, Florence set up the Knoll Planning Unit and transformed the corporate headquarters of IBM, GM and CBS, turning her back on the stuffy chintzes, florals and brocades of the time and exploring unconventional upholstery materials, such as woollen war blankets and men's pinstripe suiting. In 1964, *The New York Times* called her “the single most powerful figure in the field of modern design”.

Her timeless sofa – which the Knoll company describes as a “scaled-down translation of the rhythm and proportions of Mid-century Modern architecture” – is still in production. It's available from De De Ce (dedece.com), from \$23,350 for a three-seater.

“Florence was revolutionary,” says interior designer Jessica Viscarde of Melbourne's Eclectic Creative. “With its clean lines and unfussy approach, the sofa lends itself to almost any interior style and can blend in or stand out depending on the material. It's a design that never dates nor screams for too much attention.” *Mad Men*'s own trailblazer, Peggy, would approve. ●

