

# Finding aid for the Raymond K. Sobota furniture design collection Collection 225

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Creator:</b>	Sobota, Raymond K.
<b>Title:</b>	Raymond K. Sobota furniture design collection
<b>ID:</b>	Collection 225
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	n.d.
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3.3 Linear Feet Four boxes
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	Raymond Karl Sobota (1914-2010) was a Grand Rapids, Michigan furniture designer. Mr. Sobota graduated from the Kendall School of Art & Design in 1946. He primarily designed for Century Furniture but also did work for the Grand Rapids Bookcase and Chair Co., the Mt. Airy Furniture Co. and Hekman Furniture. The trade literature in this collection documents Sobota's reference library as well as his own furniture design. Also included are photographs and biographical news clippings.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Raymond Karl Sobota (1914-2010) was the son of Stanley and Josephine Sobota, second generation immigrants from Poland and Germany, respectively. Raymond and his twin brother, Gerald (1914-1987), were born just a year after their sister Dorothy (Mrs. Leslie Bohn). Another brother, Thomas (d. 1997), followed about 11 years later.

Sobota's uncle, Karl Schmidt, for whom he was named, designed for the Berkey & Gay Furniture Company, among others.

Sobota graduated from the furniture design program at Kendall School of Art & Design in 1946 and apprenticed with his uncle for seven years. This experience led to design work for the Grand Rapids Bookcase and Chair Co., the Mt. Airy Furniture Co. and Hekman Furniture. Sobota has the longest association, however, with the Century Furniture Co., first designing for them in 1954 and being most visible in their trade literature from the 1960s into the 1990s. As the furniture companies moved to

the southeast, so did Raymond and his wife Jeanne, first living part-time in Florida in the winters, and becoming permanent residents there in May 1973.

Sobota was honored with the American Society of Furniture Designers' (ASFD) Distinguished Designer Award in 1989. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Ferris State University's Kendall College of Art and Design in 2000, honoring his 60 years as a furniture designer. That award was accepted for him by his nephew, David Sobota.

This collection was given to the Library by Bonnie Terpstra, who is Raymond Sobota's daughter, as well as a former employee of the Grand Rapids Public Library.

Mr. Sobota lived in Florida from 1972 until his death in 2010.

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## Scope and Contents

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Trade literature in the collection documents Sobota's reference library as well as his own furniture design. Those incorporating other designers include the Berkey & Gay Style Book, which may include works of his uncle Karl Schmidt, Widdicomb designs by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibblings, Renzo R. Rutili designs for Johnson Furniture Co. and Finn Juhl's designs for Baker. Sobota is known to have worked for the Grand Rapids Bookcase & Chair Co. and Hekman Furniture, though it is unknown if the catalogs in this collection document his own work. For the great part of his life he designed for the Century Furniture Co., with some of that work represented in the trade catalogs in this collection.

The Century Furniture Company catalogs in this collection document Sobota's classically based style designs including the Carlton House New World Regency of the 1960s and later the Chambery 19th century French Provincial and the Claridge 18th century Georgian references. One of his earliest styles for Century was Citations in 1954. He designed 135 collections for Century, all starting with the letter "C;" except his personal favorite, the "Sobota" Collection which has an oriental style adapted from the Chinese Ming period. One of his earliest suggestions to Century was to acquisition rights from the Henry Ford Museum for their furniture collection.

Trade catalogs with Sobota's ownership mark have also been found in Coll. 232, the Grand Rapids Public Library Furniture Design Collection.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Bonnie Terpstra, accession numbers 2005.055A and 2005.055B

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

Coll. 204, Grand Rapids Furniture Designers Association Records

Coll. 232, GRPL Furniture Trade Catalog Collection, includes at least one catalog for the Sobota Collection (232-16-2), but also includes items for various furniture companies with Sobota's ownership mark, which are believed to have been taken from the Sobota accession.

Coll. 255, Lawrence Jessup Furniture History Collection

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Furniture industry and trade -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- History
- personal papers
- Furniture design -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Sobota, Raymond K.

- Sobota, Raymond K.
- Century Furniture Company (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

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## General

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Cardella = Italian, mahogany

Capua = Biedermeier look myrtle with black acrylic

Chin-Hau oriental

Charter Hall = country English, natural and whitewashed oak.

Camber = teakwood with black borders.

Sobota Collection = oriental

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## Collection Inventory

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### Series I. Biographical / Historical

#### Scope and Contents

Includes research materials related to the life of Raymond Sobota.

#### Biographical photos articles. Photocopies.

Title/Description	Instances
His Yen for Oriental Affects Design. In Hickory Daily Record. Nov. 8, 1976. Community Life Column / Jane Roehrs, Lifestyles editor. Says: his "K" initial stands for Karl, after his uncle. Oversized, folded.	Box 1
	Folder 1
Liking What I See : recognizing taste, talent in furniture design / by Pat Guinan. Hfd(?), July 8, 1987.	Box 1
	Folder 1
Kendall College of Art Design. Newsletter, Winter 1990.	Box 1
	Folder 1
Serenity, Classic Design and functional Elegance. In Tampa Bay/ The Suncoast's magazine. n.d.	Box 1

	Folder 1
Former Kendall Student Designs New Collection for Century. No source, n.d.	Box 1 Folder 1
Century. 10 photocopied sheets of new releases, copies of adds, copies of trade information, etc. Specific dates sources unknown.	Box 1 Folder 1
Biographical research.	Box 1 Folder 2

## Photographs

Title/Description	Instances
Professional photos.	
Raymond K. Sobota. American Society of Furniture Designers. Distinguished Designer Award, 1989.	Box 1 Folder 3
Raymond K. Sobota / Century. Shows Sobota at drawing board with books on shelf behind him.	Box 1 Folder 3
Trade Photos of Sobota (2)	
Century Furniture. Raymond K. Sobota. American Society of Furniture Designers. Distinguished Designer Award, 1989. Color. Signed by Sobota "To Bonnie Fred with love, your Dad". 2005.055B	Box 1 Folder 4
Raymond K. Sobota. American Society of Furniture Designers. Distinguished Designer Award, 1989. [duplicate of item above]	Box 1 Folder 4

## American Society of Furniture Designers

Title/Description	Instances
ASFD October Market Event program. Oct. 20, 1989. Greensboro, NC. Includes a page biography of Sobota as that years Distinguished Designer. 2005.055B.1-2	Box 1 Folder 5
Press Release. RE Sobota's Distinguished Designer Award, 1989.	Box 1 Folder 5
Offprint. Source unidentified, pg. 3-10. Pages 3-6 on Raymond K. Sobota, ASFD Distinguished Designer Award, 1989.	Box 1 Folder 5

## Clippings RE ASFD Award. (3 clippings)

Title/Description	Instances
Furniture Today, Oct. 20, 1989. RE ASFD honors.	Box 1

Folder 6

Furniture Today, Oct. 22, 1989. RE ASFD honors.

Box 1

Folder 6

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)**Series II. Periodical Literature.**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>
[serial] Colonial Homes, March/April, 1986. Reprint of Manorial replicas. [Century Furniture Co. adaptations]	Box 1 Folder 8
[serial] House Beautiful, January 1993, v. 135, no. 1.	Box 1 Folder 9
Hekman Furniture, n.d. / G.R. Bookcase Chair, 1948 / Mt. Airy Chair, 1955, 1963	Box 1 Folder 11

**Century Furniture, 1969-94. Various loose catalog pages and the following:**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>
Century Showplace. Winter Magazine 1994 [serial] Includes "Decades of Style, Ray Sobota", p. 4	Box 1 Folder 10
Copy of above article.	Box 1 Folder 10
[photocopy] A New take on Oriental / by Barbara Garet. Design Lines [column]. Wood Wood Products May 1993. [serial] 2 copies	Box 1 Folder 10
[photocopy] Encore of the Century. Country Home Oct. 1993. [serial] 2 copies	Box 1 Folder 10
[photocopy] Century News. 40th Anniversary Special Issue. P. B-7 "But the hiring of Ray Sotoba in 1953, both men say, was a key factor in ensuring the company's success. Sobota designed the first correlated group ever introduced at a furniture market. The 6000 Citation Group, unveiled at the 1954 fall market ...	Box 1 Folder 10
.f [photocopy] "Century Furniture Company takes pride in presenting The National Trust Collection of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Mr. Harley F. Shuford, Junior, President and Mr. Raymond K. Sobota, Director of Design ... " Includes excerpt from New York Times, Apr. 8, 1985 and NYT Magazine Apr. ? 1985.	Box 1 Folder 10

**Clippings, 1989-91.**



Title/Description	Instances
American Society of Furniture Designers' Distinguished Designer Award. Furniture Today, Oct. 22, 1989., p. 53.	Box 1 Folder 12
Great Adaptations. Home [section] The Tampa Tribune, Aug. 3, 1991.	Box 1 Folder 12
A Flair for Furniture / by Jeanne Malmgren. St. Petersburg Times. [12/10/1989] [Bio info. 1948 left his uncle, Karl Schmidt. First acct. Grand Rapids Bookcase and Chair Co. Next yr., Mount Airy Furniture and Chair Co., later Century Furniture and Hekman Furniture added to client list. 1954 Citation line for Century Furniture Co., the company about to go under. 65 pieces, Cherry, clean lines, tapered legs with brass collars. 38 years as Director of Design for Century, created more than 135 collections, all with names beginning with "C"]	Box 1 Folder 12

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### Series III. Furniture Trade Literature.

#### Baker

Title/Description	Instances
[Furniture catalog] Baker. Finn Juhl ["the famous Danish designer and architect"—pg. 2]. II. 15 pgs. N.d.	Box 2 Folder 1
[Furniture catalog. Has "S. Reeser"—ink, top right, cover. Has Sobota's seal imprint] MR, Milling road : a collection of choice European designs by Milling Road Furniture. A Division of Baker Furniture, G.R. n.d.	Box 2 Folder 2
[Furniture catalog. Has seal imprint "RKS. Library of Raymond K. Sobota"] A Collection of Baker Furniture : assembled for those who appreciate the finest. Holland, Mi. : Baker Furniture, Inc., n.d. LC-67-31334.	Box 2 Folder 3

#### Berkey Gay

Title/Description	Instances
The Berkey Gay style book / Berkey Gay Furniture Co. Grand Rapids, MI: Berkey Gay, [1929]. 293 pp.+ : ill. ; 31x42 cm. 2005.055	Box 4
Berkey Gay Furniture Co. Price List. Feb. 1929. 93 pg. Found inside the Berkey Gay style book above, at pg. 177.	Box 2 Folder 4

#### Century

Title/Description	Instances
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[Furniture catalog, in situ/periodical] Century / Century Furniture company, Hickory, N.C., 1977.	Box 2 Folder 5
The Claridge Collection. "The Claridge Collection, an assemblage of eighteenth-century Georgian inspired furniture, has been carefully researched and interpreted by Raymond K. Sobota for Century Furniture Company."—first page. Printed 6/89.	Box 1
Century. The Sobota Collection. [Includes a flyer. P. 1, has brief bio. Info.] Printed 10/87. [Ming Chinese adapted style]	Box 1
Chambery. Century Furniture. "Chambery was designed by Raymond K. Sobota and features design elements that reference 18th and 19th century provincial France." Printed 8/92.	Box 1
Century. Chin Hua. Edition IX. "... conceived by eminent furniture designer Raymond K. Sobota ..." Printed 5/88.	Box 1
Welcome to New World Regency ... Carlton House by Century. [cover] Introducing Carlton House ... [first page of pocket folder] Hickory, N.C. : Century Furniture Company, Hickory, N.C., [1961] Pocket contains a catalog with 3 rings at the top. The introductory pages stapled in the folder include an early photo of Sobota.	Box 3
Welcome to Carlton House. New World Regency. Advertising packet.	Box 3

### Grand Rapids Bookcase Chair Co., Hastings, Mi.

Title/Description	Instances
[Furniture catalog. Has Sobota seal on first page] Oakmasters. Grand Rapids Bookcase Chair Co., Hastings, Michigan. Catalog no. 101. 1950.	Box 2 Folder 6

### Grand Rapids Craftsman Co.

Title/Description	Instances
[Furniture catalog. Folder. Poster sized sheet, folded octo] Grand Rapids Craftsman Co. [New Chairs] n.d. "in addition to catalogue no. 8" Form 3547.	Box 2 Folder 7

### Hekman Furniture Co.

Title/Description	Instances
Over 50 Years : Heckman Furniture, Tables and chairs, 1922-1973. N.d.	Box 2 Folder 8
Heckman Fine Furniture "Thompson"—in ink, top right corner, cover. Printing by Knickerbocker Press, 12-1-76., 95 pgs.	Box 2 Folder 9
Hekman Fine Furniture. Printing by Knickerbocker Press, Sept. [19]78. 105 pgs.	Box 2

Folder 10

[Furniture catalog. Mustard colored 3-ringed binder, worn. Lined notebook paper sheet at front with red marker, unsigned note: "All piece's in this catalog designed by Raymond K. Sobota". Hekman, tables chairs. N.d.

Box 3

## John Widdicomb Co.

Title/Description	Instances
[Furniture catalog]. Red paper covers with 2 brass wing brads through 2 holes on left. Has Sotoba's seal imprint] Wm. A. Berkey, Division of John Widdicomb Co. n.d.	Box 2 Folder 11
[Furniture catalog. Paper. Octo, poster size. Has Sobota's seal imprint.] Widdicomb / designed by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibblings. n.d. Poor condition. No photocopying. See Usage Copy.	Box 2 Folder 12
Usage photocopies	Box 4
[Furniture catalog. Similar to above] Widdicomb / designed by T.H. Robjohn-Gibblings. N.d. Poor condition. No photocopying. See Usage Copy.	Box 2 Folder 13
Usage photocopy	Box 4

## Johnson Furniture Co.

Title/Description	Instances
[Furniture catalog. Has Sobota seal first page] J.[Johnson] Custom arrangements : an innovation in fine furniture / designed by Renzo R. Rutili. G.R. : Johnson Furniture Co., n.d.	Box 2 Folder 14
Landstrom Furniture Corporation (Rockford, Il.) Price List, July 1930. Bedroom and dining room furniture. Found inside the Berkey Gay style book, at pg. 177.	Box 2 Folder 15

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## Series IV. Miscellaneous.

Title/Description	Instances
Sketch. Ornamental detail. Pencil on vellum. Found at pg. 255 of the Berkey Gay Style book, also included in this collection.	Box 1 Folder 7
Designs for Convenient Living / by Richard B. Pollman. Detroit : Home Planners, Inc., 1950. Cover title: 125 Designs for Convenient Living. Formerly 728.P764:2 copy e. The presence of this item in Sobota's Collection is currently unexplained.	Box 3

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