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Los Angeles Times Magazine

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for Spring 2011

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Cup Strategy

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Printed Matter

The design library at Reform makes a compelling case for the virtues of old-fashioned, non-electronic research *by* MAYER RUS / *photographs by* MISHA GRAVENOR

Despite the glut of information that pours forth from the Internet, there are still certain things that remain beyond the reach of the Google search. If you were interested in locating, say, a chipper guide to holiday decorating from the December 1952 issue of *Living for Young Homemakers* magazine, you'd be hard pressed to track it down even in the remotest corners of the Web.

That particular gem and thousands more like it are now available for public perusal at Reform Gallery, a Shangri-la of vintage furniture and California decorative arts. Last November, when Reform moved from La Cienega into its new location on Melrose, owner Gerard O'Brien seized the opportunity to consolidate his sprawling library in one expansive space just off the main showroom. It's like a candy shop for design aficionados, students and anyone looking to establish the pedigree and provenance of a chair or lamp.

"I've always tried hard to contextualize the material I carry—to give people a sense of where these objects fall in the history of design," O'Brien says. "The library brings more intimacy to our interactions with clients. There are concentrations of literature here that you can't find in other places."

The bulk of his collection is displayed in a massive antique bookcase—"instant architecture," in O'Brien's words—salvaged from the recently vacated Berkelouw Book Dealer on Highland Avenue. In addition to a

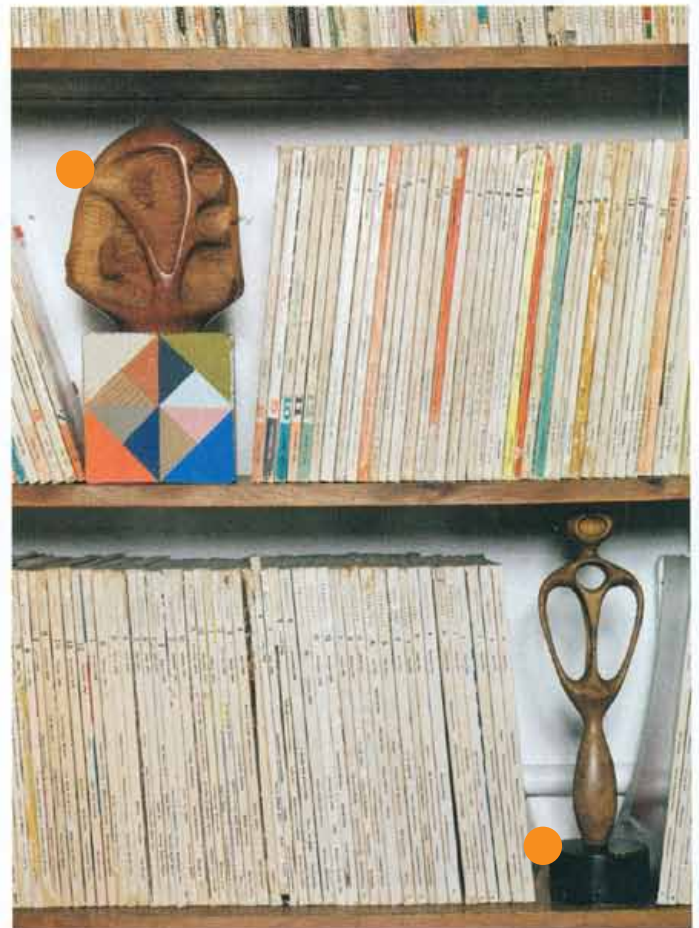
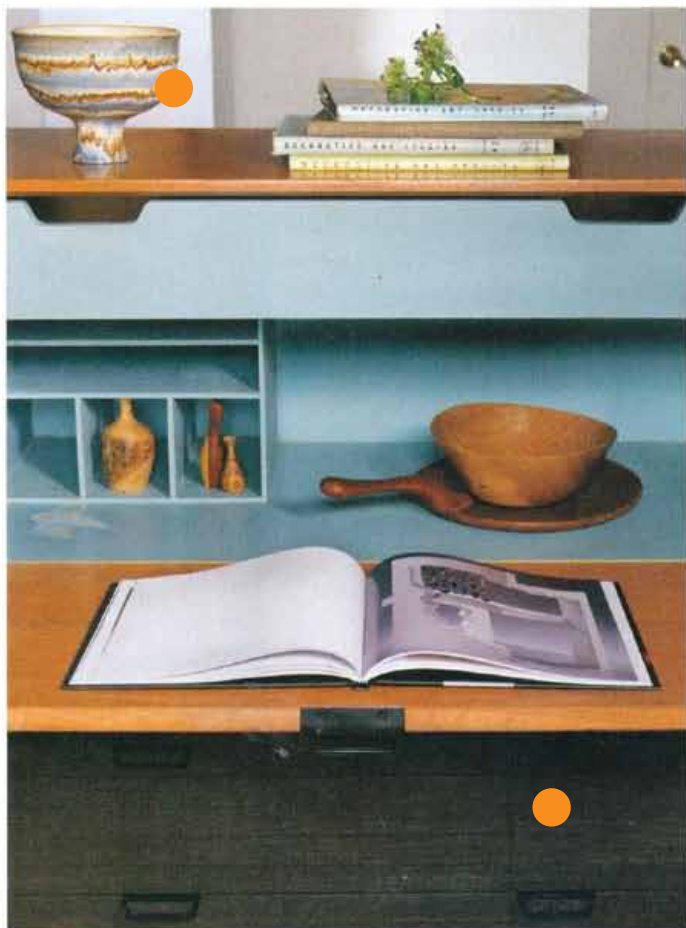
king's ransom in monographs and design compendia, there are full runs of magazines that have yet to be reprinted or reproduced in digital format. These include *Interiors*, *Craft Horizons*, three decades of the *Los Angeles Times* Sunday "Home" supplements and, of course, *Living for Young Homemakers*, a champion of modernism in the 1940s and '50s. O'Brien, a self-professed ephemera junkie, has also amassed a fabulous array of auction, exhibition and manufacturers' catalogues.

The transition from the shop to the library is marked by a set of imposing enamel-on-steel doors designed by Kay Whitcomb. The counterpart to the 19-foot-long bookcase is a 15-foot-long Paul Williams conference table of book-matched mahogany veneer that came out of the headquarters Williams designed in 1949 for the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company at the corner of Adams and Western. Other prominent pieces on display: a gargantuan conical block of wood by Pamela Blotner hanging precariously from the ceiling; and Elaine Katzer's ceramic *Tribesman* sculpture, which, like the Whitcomb doors, was featured in 1971 in the annual *California Design* survey.

If you want to confirm that last citation, there's a copy at Reform. It's right there on the shelf. 6819 Melrose Ave, L.A., 323-938-1515, reform-modern.com.



An immense hanging wood sculpture by Pamela Blotner punctuates one end of the expansive library.





A pair of totemic sculptures by John Kapel, circa 1976, flank the library's actual entry, while Kay Whitcomb's freestanding enamel doors serve as a ceremonial threshold.

Opposite: California vintage furniture and art-works provide abundant inspiration to researchers. Sculptures in bookcase are by Donald Saxby.