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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITS REVOLUTIONARY TYPE OF HANDLE DESIGNED TO FIT THE HAND

To the casual observer it might seem that any handle with which one may grasp or carry an object would fit the hand. Yet to an American designer, Thomas Lamb, came a revolutionary idea that ordinary catch-as-catch-can handles in use for centuries had never been designed for true function but, like Topsy, "jes' growed."

From the age of twenty an independent designer, chiefly in textiles, for many years Mr. Lamb spent spare time and profits in a search to produce something more vital in the design field. First came a relaxing chair, next a new type of crutch, a cane, a jeep belt and finally, after long scientific study of the anatomy of hand and fingers and their functions, he developed the Wedge-Lock handle, applicable to many objects and for the first time utilizing 100% of the power of the human hand during holding, lifting, pushing, pulling and carrying operations.

Made of plastic, metal and wood and other materials an average Lamb Wedge-Lock handle is five or six inches in length, approximately an inch thick and varies from an inch to an inch and a half in width. At first glance it resembles a piece of abstract sculpture, but it derives its form from a combination of scientifically designed contours, curves, angles, divisions, and wedges which, in addition to providing natural gripping surfaces which tend to distribute and equalize gripping tensions, utilizes the full power of the thumb. As the handle is reversely symmetrical it fits either right or left hand equally, and doesn't slip, roll or slide in the hand.

In the first exhibition of the Lamb Wedge-Lock handle, opening at the Museum of Modern Art Wednesday, March 3, the development of the idea is traced from its scientific and anatomical beginnings through its current application to various useful objects, with an indication of how it may be applied in the immediate future.

As one enters the exhibition in the first floor gallery he is confronted by a placard which states:

"Hands and brains are more flexible and productive in Man than in other animals. Largely through these two organs we have gained preeminence in our world, conquered nature in an unusual degree, and created an extensive environment of our own. Yet it is only recently that Man began to examine and analyze hands and brains, and to apply the knowledge gained thereby. The Wedge-Lock handle is such knowledge applied. In tests, compared to conventional handles of many types, it shows

great advantages in firmness of grip and comfort; fatigue and strain are notably reduced. Public acceptance of objects already licensed to use the handle has been immediate and widespread.

"The Lamb Wedge-Lock handle is shown here because it is an exceptionally clear example of the best modern approach to design: a careful evaluation of human needs and capacities led the designer to a fine original form capable of wide application."

Proceeding into the exhibition, the visitor observes on the wall at the right photographs, Xrays, and anatomical charts of the skeleton and muscles showing the structure and multiple functions of the human hand and fingers. On this wall also is a graphic comparison of the human hand with the hands of various members of the ape family.

Along the next, or window wall are machines built in the Museum workrooms demonstrating the application of the Lamb Wedge-Lock handle in carrying, twisting, pushing and pulling. The public is invited to grasp these handles and use the machines as though manipulating the actual objects themselves.

On the west wall of the gallery, objects with the Wedge-Lock handl already in manufacture and available in stores, are shown. Included in these are a hairbrush, luggage, coffee and tea makers, cooking utensils, blow pipes, saws, a package carrier, a hunting knife, a record carrying case, etc.

On the final wall of the gallery future applications of the handle are indicated, such as a tennis racket, soldering iron, telephone receiver, paper cutter, crutch, carving knife, electric and pneumatic hand tools, fishing rod, shovel, flatiron, golf club and hammer.

The exhibition has been directed and installed by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., Director of the Museum's Department of Industrial Design. After it closes in the Museum on May 16, 1948, the exhibition will be sent on a tour of other museums and galleries throughout the country.

Thomas Lamb was born in New York City, September 18, 1898. From earliest childhood he wanted to be a doctor, as he was interested in anatomy and fascinated by the mechanism of the hand. At the age of six he made scientific copies of skeletons and at eight persuaded the family doctor to lend him books on anatomy. At eleven he assisted in an emergency operation for the removal of the fifth finger.

At the age of fourteen, through the winning of a European scholarship of art, young Lamb was advised to choose art rather than a medical career. But before he had an opportunity to make use of this scholarship a designer of lace and draperies suggested that Lamb work and study in his factory during summer vacation. He accepted the designer's offer and contracted for a five-year apprenticeship in design, receiving $4 weekly for a ten-hour, six-day week.

Three years later he ranked next to his chief as a creative designer for the firm and supervised ten designers, all of them twice or three times his own age. At night he attended art classes and on Saturday evenings studied anatomy with a surgeon. Sundays this indefatigable youth relaxed by painting all day. At the age of twenty he had his own office as an independent designer and at the end of seven months was clearing $350 a week.

Most of his early work was illustration, packaging, textile design and merchandising. As a profitable hobby he illustrated children's books and designed toys and other products for juveniles. His work in textile design won international recognitition and he was often referred to as the "American Rodier". But he wasn't content just to make money. When he came out of the first World War he made up his mind that he must find a way to improve and aid rather than destroy or maim human life, and the culmination, to date, is the Wedge-Lock handle, which has alread found wide acceptance.