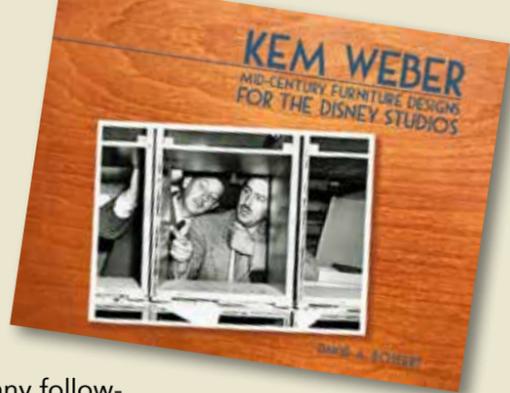


Editor's note: Disney's magical mid-century continues to be a time of tremendous fascination for Disney Vacation Club Members. Whether we explore this pivotal period of Disney history through Member Cruise presentations or the pages of *Disney Files Magazine*, Members consistently ask for more. Many follow-up questions involve architect and industrial designer Kem Weber, whose sleek, mid-century furnishings aided animators and established the visual identity of the Disney Studios. To learn more about Weber's most influential creations, we turned to our friend and multi-Member Cruise presenter Dave Bossert, who happens to have written a book on the topic. Look for "Kem Weber: Mid-Century Furniture Designs for the Disney Studios" wherever books are sold.



needed to spread out their drawings. An additional flex unit could sit atop the upper-most shelf to provide additional layout space or stand vertically to serve as an end table.

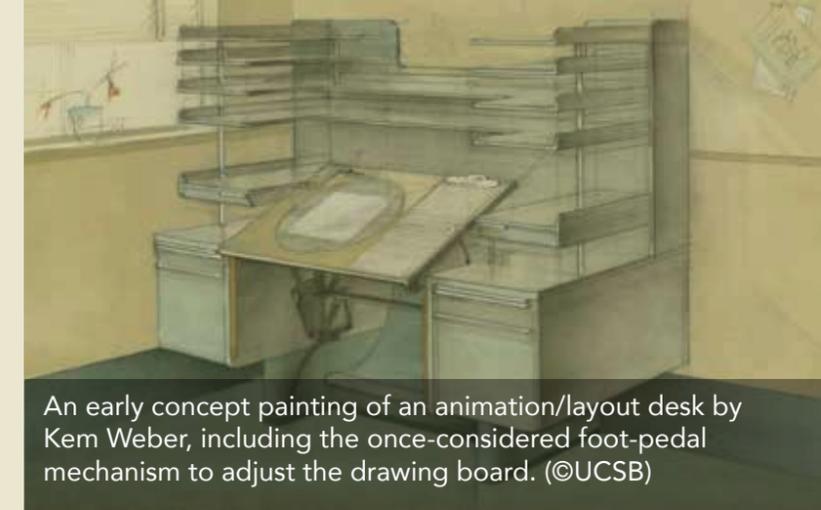
Each desk was equipped with a mechanism beneath the drawing board to allow the animator to adjust the angle of the drawing surface with the pull of a lever (likely simplified from a previously considered foot-pedal mechanism).

Even the drawer handles were thoughtfully designed. Flush mounted above recessed channels, the metal handles doubled as bottle openers. More than a gimmick, that attention to detail and comfort created a sense of permanency for a studio that had occupied multiple spaces in its infancy.

"You knew what you were doing," Musker added. "It was an art form, and it was a craft. And the desks emphasized that as much as anything in that they were so solidly built. They weren't gonna crack or break or give way, and they withstood years and years of filmmaking. But, you definitely got a feeling that you were one in a line of artists. You were part of the Knights of the Roundtable ... you just were part of a tradition, and that was cool."

About the author:

David A. Bossert is an award-winning artist, filmmaker and author. He is a veteran of The Walt Disney Company and is an independent producer, creative director and writer. Bossert is considered an authority and expert on Disney animation history. He is a member of the CalArts Board of Trustees and is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Mellon University's Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) in Pittsburgh. Bossert co-authored *Disney Animated*, which was named iPad App of 2013 by Apple and won a prestigious British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award. He is also the author of several books, including "Oswald the Lucky Rabbit: The Search for the Lost Disney Cartoons," published by Disney Editions, and "Kem Weber: Mid-Century Furniture Designs for the Disney Studios," published by The Old Mill Press. Learn more online at davidbossert.com.



An early concept painting of an animation/layout desk by Kem Weber, including the once-considered foot-pedal mechanism to adjust the drawing board. (©UCSB)



Animator and Disney Legend Frank Thomas working at the prototype animation desk he helped develop with designer Kem Weber during the production of "Pinocchio" at the Hyperion Studio (©Disney)



Animator and Disney Legend Andreas Deja at his Kem Weber-designed animation desk, which once belonged to animator and Disney Legend Milt Kahl (photo by Dave Bossert ©2018)



Kem Weber, Walt Disney and Howard Petersen, owner of Peterson Show Case and Fixture Co., inspecting the furniture construction in process, circa October 1939 (©UCSB)

The Desk That Changed Everything

Kem Weber and the iconic furnishings of the Disney Studios



By Dave Bossert

The Kem Weber Disney animation desk may be the most influential piece of furniture in Hollywood history.

The vision of legendary architect and industrial designer Kem Weber, who in 1939 served as chief designer for the Burbank, Calif., campus known today as the Walt Disney Studios, the desk was the product of a collaboration with animator and Disney Legend Frank Thomas.

Frank, one of Walt Disney's legendary "Nine Old Men," worked closely with Weber to perfect the desk's design, refining the prototype during production of *Pinocchio* at Disney's Hyperion Studio. The resulting desk was built in sections featuring interlocking channels that allowed artists to mix and match components to best suit their unique discipline and individual needs. The customizable desk was a revolution, freeing animators from the hodgepodge of desks and drawing boards that once

cluttered their workspaces and making Disney the first studio to create custom furniture specifically designed for the animation process.

"I started out in a room next to Eric Larson [Disney Legend and another of Walt's "Nine Old Men"] ... working at those desks," recalled John Musker, who with his directing partner Ron Clements brought you such modern classics as "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin," "Hercules," "The Princess and the Frog" and "Moana." "Right away, you got a feeling of the Disney tradition. It was really like we were stepping up from a VW to a Cadillac in terms of the bells and whistles of the desk—the different drawers, the shelves, the way it could tilt and move and the features, the whole thing."

The modified animator's desk, UNIT No. 19, was a more compact desk that featured drawers or cabinet space to the right of the drawing surface. The desk's left side featured a three-inch-wide wood support structure with a rounded face. Several of Walt's "Nine Old Men" even had these desks, which took up less space than traditional models, in their homes.

Another variant of the animators desk was UNIT No. 22, the assistant animator's and in-betweeners desk. Similar to the animator's desk but with more shelf space, this model was ideal for artists who



The Kem Weber-designed assistant animator's/in-betweeners desk, with additional shelf space and removable inserts (©TheOldMillPress)