

Sparton Mirrored Radios Designed by Walter Dorwin Teague

By Ed Brady

Sparton mirrored radios, designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, are among the most beautiful and sought after radios ever produced. In the mid-thirties, Sparton, like many other manufacturers, commissioned an industrial designer to help them design a radio that would have more appeal to the consumer. Sparton hired Walter Dorwin Teague.

Teague's influence gave Sparton's radios a cool and sleek appearance. The ebony-lacquered wood, chrome accent pieces and colored mirrors provided a simple but very modern style. Asymmetric, geometric shapes and accent designs are distinctively art deco in appearance.

Initial 1936 release of these radios consisted of the 1186 "Nocture" (top left), the 566 "Bluebird" (top right). The 557 "Sled" (bottom left) was released later that year and the 558 "Sled" (bottom right) a deluxe model of the 557 having expanded engravings and a forth knob for tone control was release in 1937. The chrome strips on the 557 and 558 radios are strongly reminiscent of the "speed lines" used in art deco illustrations of the period. The Ebony Sparton 517-B Cube radio with chrome trim is shown on page 7.



The advertisement announcing the release of these radios showed four covered objects with the caption "The Style Sensation of the Radio World is under these covers." It was

apparently intended to stir curiosity and increase interest in the Teague designs. Although modern and unique in their design, these sets did not sell particularly well. This is rather surprising given the success that Dorwin Teague enjoyed at Eastman Kodak.

The **STYLE SENSATION**
OF THE RADIO WORLD IS UNDER THESE COVERS



ENGINEERED WITH SPARTON "Presence" REPRODUCTION—THESE
REVOLUTIONARY MODELS CREATE AN ENTIRELY NEW SALES
OPPORTUNITY FOR SPARTON RADIO DEALERS

● Walter Dorwin Teague is one of America's foremost industrial designers. In nearly every new phase of industry he has designed products that are more beautiful and more salable—from Kodaks, stoves, glassware to trains and Ford buildings at A Century of Progress and the San Diego Exposition. He has won praise from coast to coast. Walter Teague is a great designer, but he is a great salesman, also. He knows how to beautify products to help them sell.

Sparton has the exclusive radio service of Teague. Under these four covers are the most revolutionary radio designs ever offered to the public. Although extremely revolutionary, they will be immediately accepted and set an entirely new trend in radio de-

signs. They will be unveiled September 18th and be included as part of the already attractive line of 11 models. Sparton in 1936 really has two lines—the regular line which has already been introduced, and this sensational Teague line. Both lines are superbly engineered with Sparton "Presence" reproduction and include other remarkable features, such as Super-High Fidelity, Tone Equalizer, Triolian Third-dimension Principle, New Young's Tuning, Special Superheterodyne Circuits. No dealer, under any circumstances, should miss seeing this Teague line. Watch for it. Expect it to be wonderful. You'll not be disappointed. In the meantime write for details. The Sparks-Wilkinson Company, Jackson, Michigan, Sparton of Canada, Ltd., London, Ontario.

UNVEILING SEPTEMBER 18 AT THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL AND RADIO EXPOSITION SPACE 3, 4, 5 MAIN FLOOR, GRAND CENTRAL PALACE, AND AT SPARTON DEALERS.

SPARTON

RADIO'S RICHEST VOICE NOW COMBINED WITH RADIO'S SMARTEST STYLING

So who was Walter Dorwin Teague? Teague started his professional career in advertising where he focused his creative talents on elaborate advertising illustrations, decorative

design and typography. In the mid-1920s he moved into commercial packaging. At 43, he established a sole proprietorship devoted to product and package design.

His first big client was Eastman Kodak. He went on to design a number of well-known cameras including the art deco gift camera, the baby brownie and the Bantam Special considered a masterpiece of Art Deco styling and one of the most popular cameras ever produced.



The Gift Box Camera

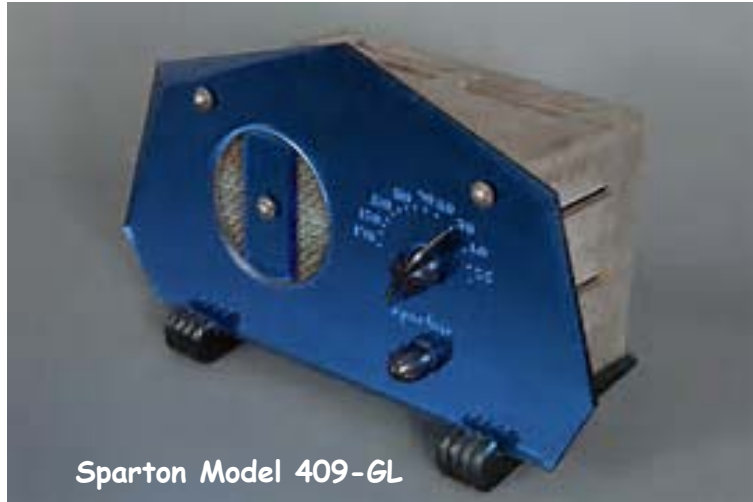


The Bantam Special Camera

Other memorable work by Teague includes the "Ford Building at Chicago's The Century of Progress" 1933-34 fair, the "Texaco exhibition hall at the 1935 Texas Centennial Exposition" in Dallas, Texas, the "Ford Pavilion for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition" in Balboa Park in San Diego, the 1961 "Civil War Centennial Dome" in Richmond, Virginia, the "US Science Center for the World's Fair" in Seattle, as well as the "House of the Future" for the Festival of Gas Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair.

In 1938, Sparton introduced the last of its' mirrored radios, the Model 409-GL, a seven-sided "personal radio." This radio sold for \$18.95 and was marketed as a second radio for the den or boudoir in the home. As Sparton tells it: "Here is beveled midnight blue mirror glass modeled in a rhythmic, modern design enriched with touches of silver glints and ebony black. It is a magnificent, artistic coalition of contour and colors...a worthy successor to the widely accepted Sparton Bluebird model...a radio thoughtfully designed to harmonize with all interiors, whether modern or traditional. Truly an original and imaginative gift whose beauty and character are too elusive to be trapped in words."

The radio is a four-tube, AC-DC, super heterodyne circuit with both a ballast tube and a resistance line cord. The two feet on the radio were finished with black lacquer. A grey flock finish was used on the back of the mirror and the wooden cabinet. This provided a very unobtrusive matte finish. I was lucky enough to purchase a Model 409-GL a few months ago to compliment my Sparton Bluebird and my 557 sled.



The first time I saw a 409-GL was in an advertisement for the radio, shown below, that I found in one of the many radio magazines I own.

Created By the Sure Hand of Experience!

Dealers everywhere have asked for this new version of Sparton, wrought in Midnight Blue Mirror Glass like its amazingly successful predecessor — the Sparton Bluebird model. And now it is ready for Christmas selling—a merchandising triumph that will sell at an accelerated pace as thousands are given the opportunity to appraise and appreciate its beauty and surpassing performance.

NEW SPARTON
BLUE Mirror GLASS
Personal Radio

“CYNOSURE” OF ALL EYES

Style Leader of All Radios

Here is beveled Midnight Blue Mirror Glass modeled in a rhythmic, modern design enriched with touches of silver glints and ebony black. It is a magnificent, artistic coalition of contour and colors . . . a worthy successor to the widely accepted Sparton Bluebird Model . . . a radio thoughtfully designed to harmonize with all interiors, whether modern or traditional. Truly an original and imaginative gift whose beauty and character are too elusive to be trapped in words. It is featureful, too, with 5-tube (with ballast) AC-DC chassis and rich-tuned dynamic speaker.

FREE DISPLAY

The stunningly beautiful display unit shown above is given FREE to all Sparton dealers. The display lends itself to dramatic use in show window or store, and it has the power of creating sales because it glorifies the smartest radio yet to reach the market.

Ready Now For Immediate Delivery.

THE SPARKS-WITHINGTON COMPANY, JACKSON, MICHIGAN

NEW SPARTON
BLUE Mirror GLASS
Personal Radio

“CYNOSURE” OF ALL EYES

THE NEW ROOM THE BOARD THE MARVEL THE LIBRARY THE NIGHT TABLE THE SEPARATION ROOM

A PERSONAL RADIO

Priced for the Modest Gift Budget \$18⁹⁵

Western Prices Slightly Higher

November, 1938

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Once I had the radio on display at home I realized that it would look so much better if I had the display sign to go with it. It is my understanding that this display was given to

dealers to accent the radio in their showrooms and draw customers attention to the radio. Thus there are none available today. Or, at least, I have never seen one.

Using the ad page and the dimensions of the radio itself I was able to come up with general dimensions for the display and to begin the process of recreating the standup back using Photoshop.

Photoshop is one of the most amazing computer applications I own. It amazes me how much it can do. Given the relatively simple design of concentric circles and squares I was able to reproduce the artwork relatively easily with Photoshop. The difficult part was how to reproduce it onto hardboard so that it would be rigid enough to be stood upright without bending.

After a lot of internet searching for options, I realized that trying to have it printed directly to hardboard was too expensive. I finally decided that the most economical way to print it was to reproduce it onto poster paper and then have it mounted onto matt board. It wasn't ideal but when completed it would look authentic and represent the period in its form and texture.

Staples provided the printing of the artwork onto poster board and Hobby Lobby did the mounting and cutting. I was able to create two for about \$50.

The base was created using 1 x 8 lumber cut to 1 x 7 x 14. Of course finished 1 x 8 is actually $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 7.5" and at $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick the board looked too thin for the backdrop size. So I glued a $\frac{1}{4}$ " piece of cherry plywood to the base to get the thickness up to 1". This turned out to be a plus as the cherry made a very smooth surface for applying the black lacquer top coat. Kinkos provided the printing of the labeling for the front edge of the base.



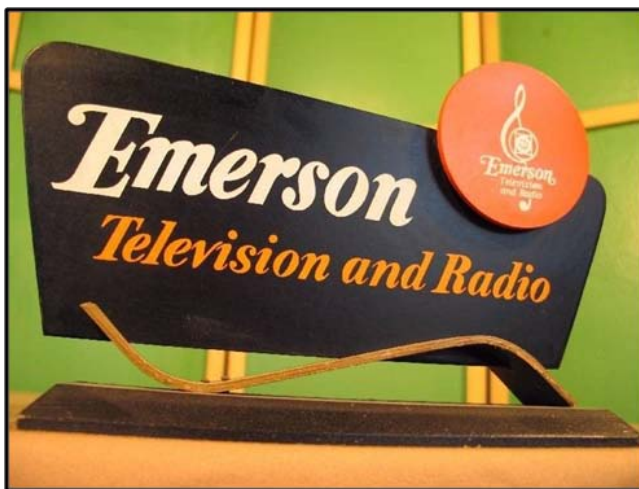
After a Couple of Weekends of Work I had my Display



FINISHED DISPLAY

I think it turned out very nicely and provides a great backdrop for my 409 Sparton radio. It's probably not worthy of Walter Teague's artistic talent but I think it definitely does justice to the radio displayed in my office.

It turned out so well that I am working on creating other signs. The most recent is an Emerson sign to go with my Emerson Ingraham collection. Others are in the works.....



The Original



The Recreation



The Ebony Sparton 517-B Cube radio, also designed by Teague, was also released in 1936. It is one of several cube radios having the speaker located on the top. The 517 has the same chassis as the 557 Mirrored radio.

The 517 is in natural walnut finish and the 517W is in Ivory finish, both without the chrome strips.

Courtesy John Anthes