



## CHARLES HARRISON: LIFE'S WORK

Review by Afrogeek

Forget the Illumanti. When history judges this present as past the designers will be branded as the unspoken architects of these postmodern times, the shadow sculptors of the current psyche. Charles Harrison belongs in this pantheon of design legends, and his autobiographical survey of his design career, *A Life's Design* proves it.

Nestled in one hundred and twenty five odd square bound pages are the life's works of Sears, Roebuck & Company's first black design talent. With upgrades and creations on everything from the plastic garbage can to the View-Master, Charles Harrison gives us a sense not only of his life but of his creations. He includes original sketches and blueprints as well as pictures and catalog excerpts on almost every page. The casual observer is left overwhelmed with the breadth of this man's endeavors, while the design student can marvel at the joys of design when blow-molded polypropylene was the new thing.



You feel a sense of reverence when looking at Mr. Harrison's industrial design. It's obviously free of the current design constraint/challenge of branding. Much of his professional life he worked for Sears, Roebuck & Company when they were the best, indeed only, all home appliance store. Yet his constant return to the needs of the user is apparent not only in his words but also in his design. Think about the huge furniture that was grandma's television. You know the one with its own cabinet frame? He designed that so that the television looked as though it were just another fixture in the house. His designs delivered what the old TV show

*The Jetsons* promised; his sketches and much of their reality are one in the same. Add to this incredible talent the fact that he was a black man in a field dominated by his white counterparts and you're forced to wonder how he survived it. How did he survive the heart of white corporate culture for upwards of thirty years? It was all through design.

1 November 2006