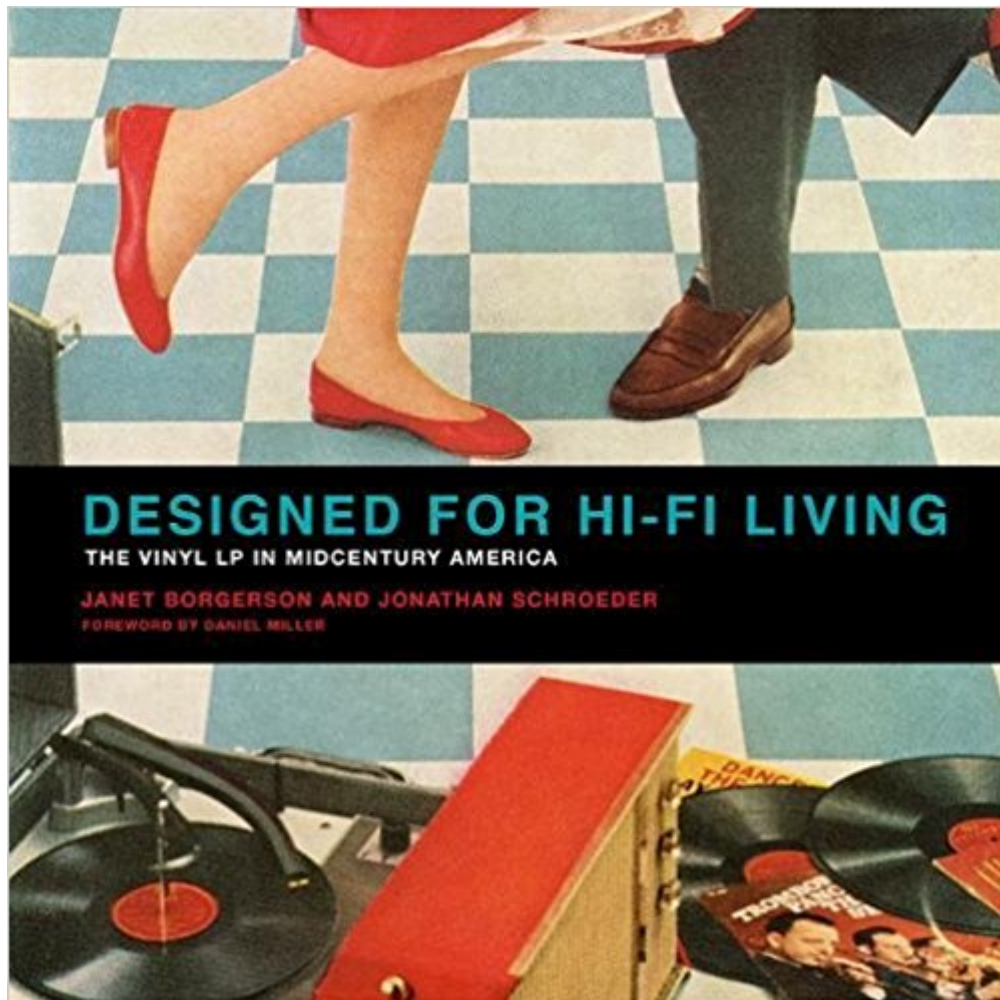




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Designed For Hi-Fi Living: The Vinyl LP In Midcentury America (MIT Press)



Synopsis

The sleek hi-fi console in a well-appointed midcentury American living room might have had a stack of albums by musicians like Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, or Patti Page. It was just as likely to have had a selection of LPs from slightly different genres, with such titles as *Cocktail Time*, *Music for a Chinese Dinner at Home*, *The Perfect Background Music for Your Home Movies*, *Honeymoon in Hawaii*, *Strings for a Space Age*, or *Cairo! The Music of Modern Egypt*. The brilliantly hued, full-color cover art might show an ideal listener, an ideal living room, an ideal tourist in an exotic landscape -- or even an ideal space traveler. In *Designed for Hi-Fi Living*, Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder listen to and look at these vinyl LPs, scouring the cover art and the liner notes, and find that these albums offered a guide for aspirational Americans who yearned to be modern in postwar consumer culture. Borgerson and Schroeder examine the representations of modern life in a selection of midcentury record albums, discussing nearly 150 vintage album covers, reproduced in color -- some featuring modern art or the work of famous designers and photographers. Offering a fascinating glimpse into the postwar imagination, the first part, "Home," explores how the American home entered the frontlines of cold war debates and became an entertainment zone -- a place to play music, mix drinks, and impress guests with displays of good taste. The second part, "Away," considers albums featuring music, pictures, and tourist information that prepared Americans for the jet age as well as the space race.

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Customer Reviews

This extraordinary and brilliantly curated book reveals how the tropes of cultured living were disseminated through the universal medium of music decades before the era of 'designer pop.' Revisionary and essential. (Peter Saville, artist and designer; founder and art director of Factory Records; author of *Designed by Peter Saville*) Exploring the secret life of records, Borgerson and Schroeder comb through the discarded and recovered bins of thrift-store vinyl for clues to a hidden agenda. At once hilarious and penetrating, their astute observations and thoughtful groupings cut across genre, label, and designer to reveal uncanny continuities that link jazz, rock, easy listening, self-help, exotica, folkloric, and other impossible to pin-down modalities in an eye-popping slide show of the midcentury American imaginary. (John Corbett, writer and curator; author of *Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium* and *A Listener's Guide to Free Improvisation*) What Walter Benjamin means for the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century, Borgerson and Schroeder mean to the midcentury American living room. Through the magical window of the LP cover they let us rediscover the phantasmagorias of postwar America. I love this book. (Daniel Birnbaum, Director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm and contributing editor of *Artforum*)

Janet Borgerson is a Visiting Fellow at City, University of London. After her father brought home for her copies of The Monkees vinyl LPs, and then The Beatles, Rubber Soul, she has never been without records. As a kid, upon arriving at a new place, setting up her own small Panasonic stereo system with separate speakers felt like a personal accomplishment, and a reaffirmation of identity. Now, having so many LPs from so many different eras and places and genres seems to keep at bay anything like a sedimented way of being. Borgerson divides her time between New York, Michigan, London and the other parts of the world where she has friends and family. She is working on several manuscripts.

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