

[Audio: Hagley History Hangout, New Episode Available: Megan Elias](#)

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: Hilton Hotels started in Texas and swelled into a globe-straddling hospitality behemoth. Along the way company founder Conrad Hilton kept ideas about affordable luxury at the center of his business model. Among the affordable luxuries on offer in Hilton Hotels was an “eclectic modernist” design sensibility that placed the American consumer at the apex of a global cultural hierarchy. In her book project, Megan Elias, associate professor and director of the Gastronomy program at Boston University, traces a design history of Hilton Hotels.

To uncover this story, Elias conducted research in multiple Hagley Library collections, such as the William Pahlmann Associates papers, and the Ernst Dichter papers. Among her key findings are how design decisions bore upon the business of hospitality at every turn. From architecture to furniture, food, and art, every aspect of the experience of a Hilton Hotel was crafted to appeal to consumer desires. Whereas hospitality had traditionally been an ersatz affair with uncomfortable boarding houses and public accommodations that compared unfavorably with the comforts of home. In the twentieth century, Hilton and competitor firms, transformed hospitality into an industry for the mass consumption of luxury, and made hotels better than homes.

To support her research Dr. Elias received funding from the Center for the History of Business, Technology, & Society at the Hagley Museum & Library.

The audio only version of this program is available on our podcast. The link to this Hagley History Hangout is

<https://www.hagley.org/research/history-hangout-13>.

Recorded on Zoom and available anywhere once they are released, our History Hangouts include interviews with authors of books and other researchers who have use of our collections, and members of Hagley staff with their special knowledge of what we have in our stacks. We began the History Hangouts earlier this summer and now are releasing programs every two weeks on alternate Mondays. Our series is part of the [Hagley from Home](#) initiative by the Hagley Museum and Library. The schedule for upcoming episodes, as well as those already released, is available at <https://www.hagley.org/hagley-history-hangout>.

Roger Horowitz

Executive Director

Hagley Center

Carol Ressler Lockman

Manager

Hagley Center