

# A Woman's Rise to Fame as Designer

## Story of Mrs. Helen Hughes Dulany

By Kathleen McLaughlin

TO THE swelling din of countrywide plaudits, Chicago is turning a pleased but puzzled countenance these days to a tiny studio on its lake front.

It isn't often that an untrained inland artist acquires national recognition, as Helen Hughes Dulany has done, in a little more than three years. It is epochal when that artist progresses in that interim not only from obscurity to fame but from the status of a hopeless invalid to the brisk, brimming days of an over-worked genius with a many-angled career. And loves it.

At opulent annual fees, she is consultant designer today to a half dozen important firms, headed by the Republic Steel corporation. She has just been retained by General Electric to revamp its line of electric ranges, on which distinguished masculine minds have concentrated for many expensive hours. She originated the stainless steel table utensils so admired in the Zephyr, the Burlington's streamlined train. Yet nobody taught her how, for she never had an art lesson in her life.

Between times she operates her

own shop in Michigan boulevard and runs her sizable apartment.

She has taken it all in her stride. The dizzy transition from empty hours she sought to fill toying with damp clay, to distract her mind from the chilling predictions of her doctors, to the teeming office hours that would exhaust most men. The meteoric swing from her family's amusement to its startled realization that great concerns bid high for her services. The pyramiding into five figures of the fifty dollars she spent to launch herself professionally.

Nobody dreamed, least of all Helen Dulany, that her mind and her fingers could work magic with lines and forms in metals old and new. Yet she brought revolutionary ideas to the world of industrial design that have launched at least two novel phases of manufacture that started wheels turning and provided jobs and markets where there were none before.

It was Mrs. Dulany who first "fashioned" stainless steel into service plates, coffee services—made by hand—and other bric-a-brac, when the steel men themselves told her it "couldn't be done."

It was she who discovered a meth-



All aboard—the Zephyr. Mrs. Dulany inspecting stainless steel dishes of her own design, which created a sensation by use of a structural metal.

od for backing glass, in the manufacture of plates and other dishes, to prevent edges from chipping, when old and expert hands at the game long since had given up the problem. Her patent in this field will net her a pretty penny for many a year to come.

Now the artistic and industrial world keeps an attentive eye on the output of the box of a studio atop the brick apartment building at 336 Lake Shore drive, and lends a respectful ear when she submits an opinion. For she has made her mark not only as an inventor but as a creator of enchanting interior furnishings, backed with a discriminating taste for which there is no substitute. Moreover, retailers scramble to purchase her designs, and the public buys and buys.

All this began quite unconsciously about four years ago, when she tried her hand at modeling things in clay while she lay ill, warned by physicians that she probably never would return to an active life. Her own success with the game surprised her. She attempted portraiture and turned out almost uncanny likenesses.

Gradually and unexpectedly she regained her health. The episode of moving into her present modern apartment, into which none of the family heirlooms would fit gracefully, it developed, started explorations into the resources of her own mind for furnishings that wouldn't quarrel with her background.

Under the impression, she relates, that she hated the furniture called "modern," she began to design her

own. Then came the long and sometimes disheartening search for craftsmen who could execute her ideas. One by one she located capable men. It was an education and a fruitful experience. Quite often they laughed at her, then listened, then grew interested, then set their hands and minds to the task and solved it.

The surprise the results inspired, and the compliments, instilled a suspicion that she might do something with them commercially. The Dulany fortunes, like many another, had undergone the stress of the depression era. But she had fifty dollars of her own that "wasn't working," so she risked it to finance her venture. With a number of articles of her own design copied by her workmen, she went to New York and came back with a pocketful of orders. She is exultantly proud of the fact that she has never borrowed a nickel from her family or friends for the enterprise.

There was considerable hilarity in the family group when she confided that she had become a business woman. Her brother, George Hughes, an official of General Electric, was especially amused. She never could persuade him even to set foot in the studio where she worked busily day after day. He still hasn't seen it.

The other day he sat in on a conference of his firm concerning the design of its electric ranges. Across the table one man spoke up:

"I am getting more and more convinced that we ought to call in a woman in this matter. Now, I've been hearing about Helen Hughes Dulany—"

know her name. Helen Hughes Dulany."

She got the contract.

Most of her work is from rough sketches, in conference with the staff she has assembled, made up of trained, intelligent workmen.

The smartest of the class magazines snatch greedily for photographs of her latest creations in tableware—elegant, sophisticated, but not bizarre things that sacrifice no bit of their usefulness to appearance.

She was flattered at first when she found that swank New York shops were calmly appropriating credit for her products in those same periodicals, merely because they had them for sale. After a score or more such episodes she quietly and effectively staged a single-handed revolution. By the simple expedient of refusing to take any more articles to the New York market she demanded and is receiving proper recognition and credit.

One of the largest department stores in New York has sent five buyers to Chicago already this year to see and buy her designs. Another outstanding institution in San Francisco phoned her fretfully recently that it couldn't find her work on exhibit in the east, and would it have to send a buyer to her from the west coast?

"Fraid so, if you want it," was the reply. "I'm showing only in Chicago."

"In New York I am only one of dozens," she explains. "In Chicago the field is less crowded and I am an individual."



Design for eating. This basically simple table setting, combining steel with glass in both candelabra and centerpiece—several arrangements of the latter are possible—won instant and wide approval.

Helen Hughes was born at Blomington, N. D., where her parents settled after their journey across the

prairies in a covered wagon and where her father was a member of the commission that located the capital, her future home town. Five brothers, all older, completed the family group. They moved to Minneapolis when she was fifteen, where she attended boarding school.

After her marriage to George W. Dulany Jr., third generation lumberman and chairman of the Dulany trust, she spent some years in Clinton, Ia., and a couple of years abroad before coming to live in Chicago in 1920. Her major interests include her year-old grandson, whose parents are Mr. and Mrs. George W. Dulany III, of Evanston, and her home.

Because of delicate health she gave up her favorite recreation, horseback riding, some years ago, and her only exercise now is walking, which she loves.

She has been retained by the Burlington to assist Holabird and Root in their designs for car interiors. And everything she does is advanced "modern"—in the spirit she thought she disliked. It is, however, her own version, a modern that goes back for its fundamentals to the clean and classic lines of ancient Egypt and Greece. It is, she believes, the only true expression of art for today's generation.

"At first I thought it was fun to design for sophisticated people," she recalls. "But it is to the molding of the taste of the unsophisticated that I prefer to contribute now."

That's why her work is fun.



Studio conference. The designer at work with one of her craftsmen, Charles Cadman, on the candelabra shown at the upper right.



Beautiful to see, practical to use, easy to clean. One of Mrs. Dulany's buffet services. The metal ball is an ice bucket.

# Duke Borea, 103, Grand Old Man of Italy

## Has Served Under 4 Kings

By David Darrah

Rome, Italy.

"WRITE my memoirs? I would never have time; and, besides, isn't it better to keep silent?" says 103-year-old Duke Giovanni Battista Borea d'Olmo, grand master of court ceremonies and prefect of the royal palace, in answer to questions.

And he really means it. But should he ever, with his remarkable memory, which is still clear in spite of his more than a century of age, decide to write of the events he has witnessed and participated in, it would be almost a history of modern Italy, for Duke Borea, once a secretary of Cavour, has served under four kings and has lived through the entire unification period from the time when Metternich called Italy "a mere geographical expression" to the present dictatorship under Mussolini.

And to him Garibaldi, Mazzini, Charles Albert, Cavour, Crispi, Victor Emmanuel II, and all the heroes of the last century of Italian history are not mere names, but actual personalities who still live in the aged duke's recollection, for he was born on Oct. 11, 1831, at a time when Italy was under the Austrian yoke and the bands of patriots were just beginning their fight for freedom.

The duke has entered his hundred and fourth year still strong and vigorous of body and lucid of mind, and he continues despite this advanced age to carry out his duties as prefect of the royal palace and master of ceremonies. Only recently, on the birth of Princess Maria Pia di Savoia at Naples, he supervised the sending out of sixteen hundred letters drafted in different court etiquette formulas and addressed to royalty and to heads of governments all over Europe.

A bachelor and a teetotaler, Duke Borea is often asked how he managed to live to his venerable age, and he replies that it was probably because he chose good parents for himself. Longevity is a family trait. The duke had two brothers, one of



One-hundred-three-year-old Duke Giovanni Battista Borea d'Olmo of Italy, grand master of court ceremonies and prefect of the royal palace. (Acme photo.)

whom died at 83 and the other at 93. The second died of infectious pneumonia, which he accidentally contracted, and the duke says, "If he hadn't caught this disease he would be here with us today telling stories about the past."

No medical man who comes in contact with the duke fails to question him about his heredity, his past, his habits and diet, each hoping to wrest from him the secret of his longevity. He is often asked what diseases he has had in his long life, and he replies that once he had a light attack of pneumonia,

"But that was when I was ten years old, and it left me with a cough which specialists in Torino and Genoa were unable to cure. So I've been coughing a little for the last 83 years," he adds slyly.

The duke has no health fads and takes no special measures to preserve his health. He smoked when he was a comparatively young man of seventy, but gave up smoking some twenty-four years ago.

His daily routine is simple. He gets up at nine o'clock in the morning, breakfasts on coffee and milk

and a roll, reads the papers and attends to any duties he has till noon. He lunches heartily without any special dietary considerations, and amuses himself with his radio set in the afternoon. He has tea at five o'clock, and his dinner at night consists of two courses only, a vegetable and dessert. He listens to music at night, of which he is passionately fond, and goes to bed at eleven.

When duties call him Duke Borea comes to Rome, but most of his waning days are spent in the peaceful solitude of his villa adjoining the beach at San Remo, a villa in which his family has lived since 1481. The villa has a restful garden overlooking the sea. Its facade was designed by the famous architect Bernini and executed by his pupils. During five hundred years it has sheltered many distinguished persons.

For instance, Napoleon Bonaparte was a guest within its walls, and Pope Pius VII, whom Napoleon threw into prison, was also a guest there when he was returning to Italy from Fontainebleau. Other guests were Garibaldi and Elizabeth Farnese, who after her marriage by proxy passed through San Remo on her way to join her new husband, Philip V. of Spain.

These memories and the bland Mediterranean setting of the villa help to soften the final years of the man who has been the friend and servant of kings, queens, and statesmen for more than seventy-five years, of the faithful servant who declares that when he accompanied the present sovereigns of Italy on the first visit to the pope on Dec. 8, 1929, following the Lateran peace, a dream which he had cherished for half a century had been realized.

The duke, as previously stated, was born in Genoa on Oct. 11, 1831, when Andrew Jackson was President of the United States, when Louis Philippe had been king of France for just one year, and Queen Victoria was not yet on the throne she occupied for sixty-eight years. He was the son of the Marchese Michele Borea d'Olmo and the Marchesa Anna Parega. In person he is a man of medium height, of distinguished appearance and proud bearing. And at the same time his compatriots describe him as being of most sympathetic personality.

Fond of traveling, the duke has visited the whole of Europe either on diplomatic missions or for his own pleasure, and his life has been associated with the highest social and

aristocratic figures of the last century.

His early years of childhood were spent at San Remo in the villa where he now witnesses the twilight of his life. About the year 1840 he was sent to a school in Savona kept by the Scolopi Fathers, an order founded by Joseph Calasanzio and an institution famous for its discipline and the quality of its young aristocratic pupils.

There he carried on his studies from his tenth to his sixteenth year and became noted among his fellow students for his marvelous memory.

This phenomenal memory still serves him. He knows exceedingly well the minutest details about things that happened fifty years ago. Some time ago he went to see the play "Villa Franca," written by the playwright Piranesi in collaboration with Mussolini, a historical play dealing with events in the late '50's of the last century, and he declared there were inaccuracies in it.

"For instance, Count Cavour often lost his temper, but never his manners," said the duke, "while in the play he is portrayed as being badly brought up, which is untrue."

But to resume the story of the duke's life. It was the custom at the Scolopi college to give the boy who passed the final examinations with greatest credit the position as page at the court of the kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, the kingdom which was the first nucleus of unified Italy.

Duke Borea passed his examinations with honors, but in addition to that he was personally named to the post because he had attracted the attention of King Charles Albert, the monarch who granted a constitution to his budding country in 1848. King Charles Albert was attracted by the boy and chose him personally for the envied position of court page.

This was the beginning of his long career as court official and diplomat.

In 1856, when he was twenty-five years old, he passed further examinations for entering the ministry of foreign affairs and became the secretary of Count Cavour, the prime minister of the struggling young kingdom of Italy.

He served with Cavour for many years and knew during this time Crispi, Nigra, and many others, and he possesses many letters and souvenirs of them. Later on Duke Borea became inspector of personnel at the ministry of foreign affairs.

In 1892 the duke left the ministry of foreign affairs and two years later

was named master of ceremonies by Victor Emmanuel II.

In 1906 Victor Emmanuel III, the present king, made him grand master of ceremonies, and then in 1916, when he was nearly 90 years old, he became prefect of the royal palace. The old duke remembers with tears in his eyes the late Queen Margherita, King Victor Emmanuel's mother, who used to say that she had always known him because she had always seen him. He seemed perennial.

In 1914 the present king gave him the title of duke and also made him a senator of the kingdom.

The duke keeps a careful record of all events in the lives of the princes and princesses of the royal house.

He has attended the marriage of every reigning member of the house of Savoy since Italy became a united kingdom. They were four.

The duke as a boy was present in 1842 at the marriage of Victor Emmanuel II, then crown prince of Sardinia, to the Archduchess Marie Adelaide of Austria.

Later in the century he attended

the wedding of King Humbert to Queen Margherita, Humbert being successor to Victor Emmanuel II.

In 1900 he was present at the wedding of Humbert's son, Victor Emmanuel III, to Helena of Montenegro, and in 1930 he, as master of ceremonies and prefect of the palace, was in charge of the wedding ceremonies of Crown Prince Humbert and Maria Jose of Belgium.

A great amateur of music, the duke also is fond of his radio set and tinkers with it every night to pick up the choice musical programs broadcast from all European stations. He says he is fond of Viennese waltzes.

An anecdote is told of him that his main objection to the Fascist regime here, of which he has since become tolerant, was the fact that he detested the music of "Giovanezza," the chief Fascist hymn.

In the duke's room in the villa at San Remo there are no pictures or tapestries, but only an unlimited collection of photos and paintings of the

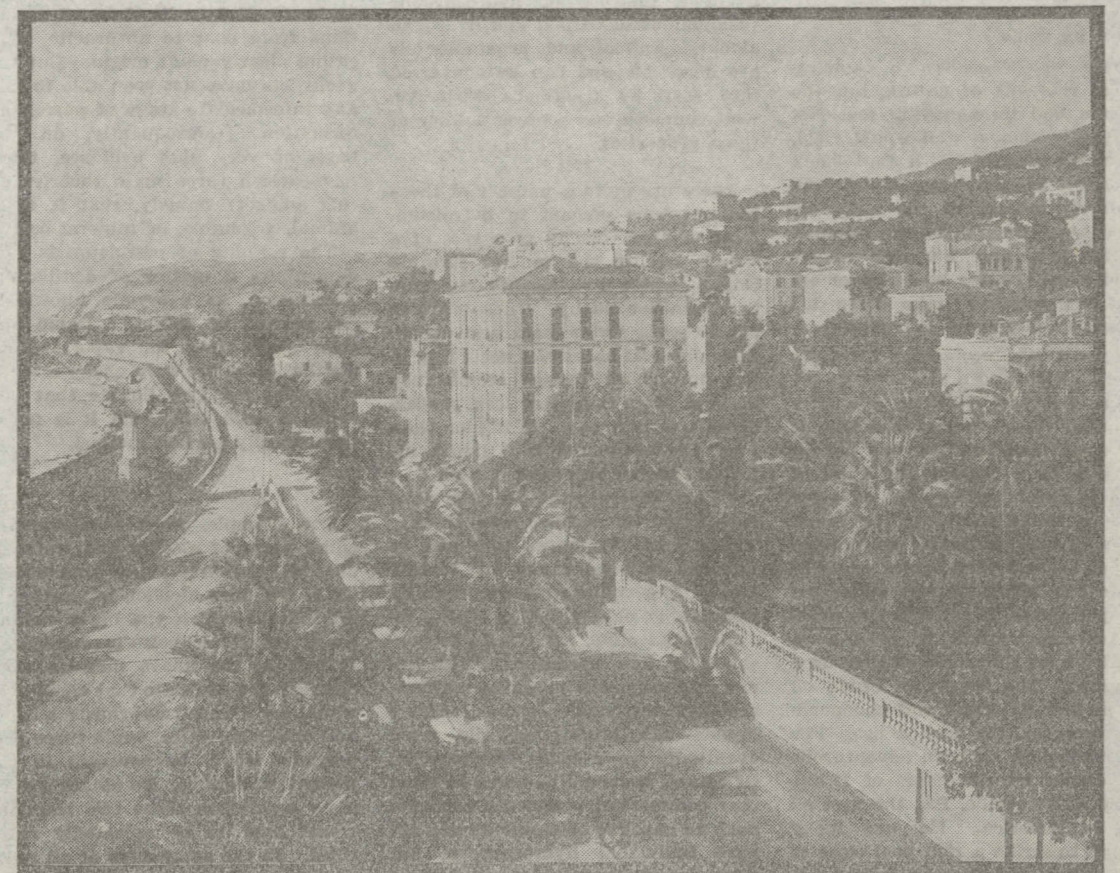
persons he has known during his long life. He is said by his many friends to be very kindly disposed, and he often meditates over his past days and says that his greatest satisfaction is that he never caused any harm to anyone, at least consciously.

"And what about Mussolini?" he is asked often by callers.

A great diplomat, Duke Borea finds only kind words to say, "Mussolini? A marvelous man—such courage, such force! I remember when he—"

and the duke dodges conversational perils with a sudden lapse of memory; and then he recollects and begins again, "And, as we were saying—" and so he winds around back to a safe subject.

Duke Borea, of course, possesses a deluge of decorations. They fill a small-sized glass cabinet. Near this museum of medals and ribbons and decorations in Duke Borea's home there is another not less interesting, made up of portraits, autographs of the famous personalities whom the duke has met, and photographs with dedications.



Delightful San Remo, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Near the beach here is the villa in which Duke Borea resides and in which his family has dwelt since 1481.