



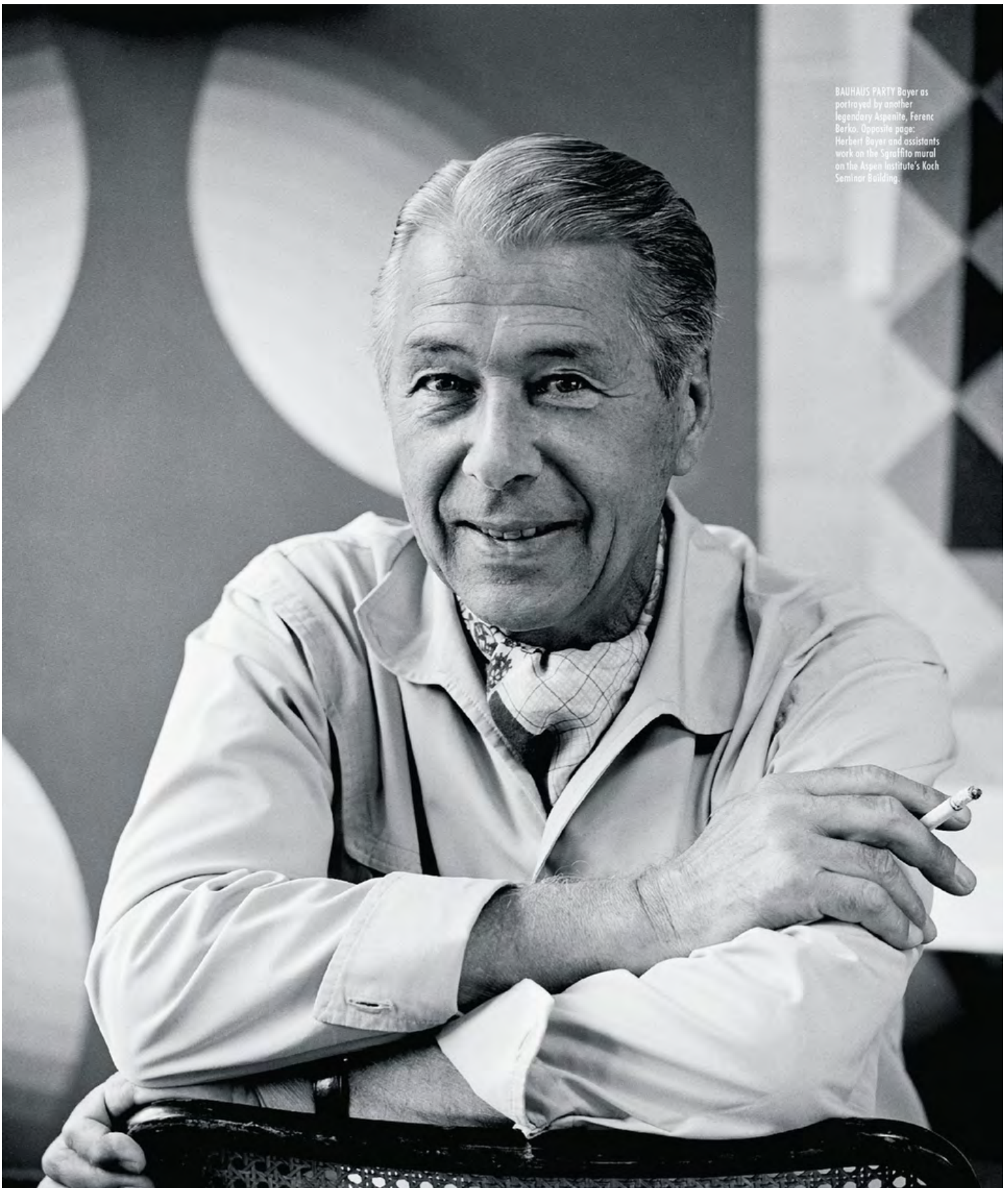
# RENAISSANCE MAN

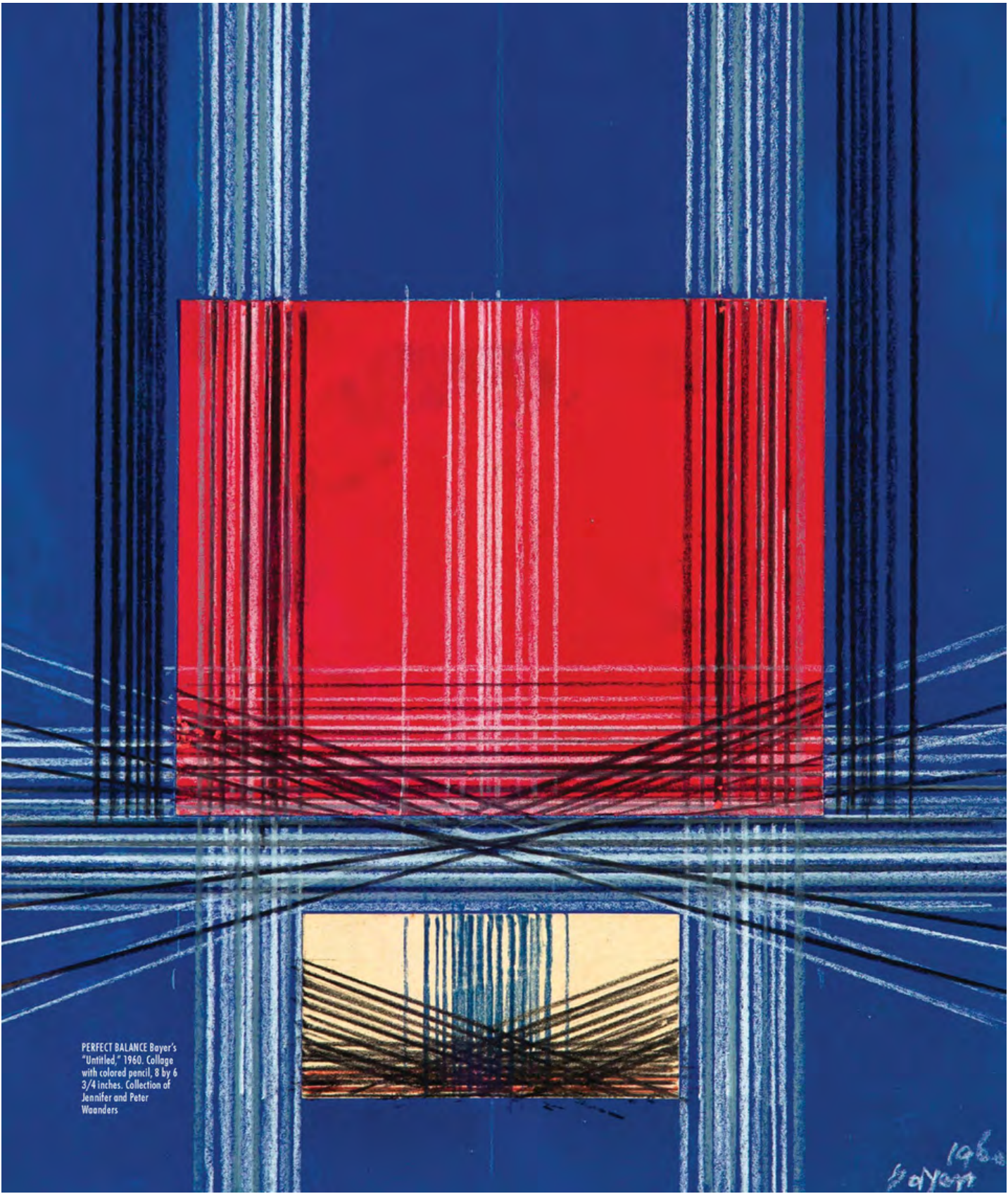
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE REVISITS HERBERT  
BAYER'S ALL-ENCOMPASSING DESIGN  
LEGACY IN ASPEN AND BEYOND WITH  
A NEW EXHIBITION.

By David Floria

PHOTOS BY FERENC BERNO, COURTESY OF THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

BAUHAUS PARTY Bayer as  
portrayed by another  
legendary Aspenite, Ferenc  
Berka. Opposite page:  
Herbert Bayer and assistants  
work on the Sgraffito mural  
on the Aspen Institute's Koch  
Seminar Building.





PERFECT BALANCE Bayer's  
"Untitled," 1960. Collage  
with colored pencil, 8 by 6  
3/4 inches. Collection of  
Jennifer and Peter  
Wanders

1960  
Bayer

## “HIS FIRST ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT WAS THE ORIGINAL OCTAGONAL SUNDECK RESTAURANT ON TOP OF ASPEN MOUNTAIN.”

When noted Austrian Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer arrived in Aspen in 1946, it was still a sleepy little mining and ranching town. He had been invited by Walter Paepcke, the Chicago industrialist and the visionary behind the “Aspen Idea” of a utopian community dedicated to nurturing mind, body and spirit. The two men had met in New York City when Paepcke saw Bayer’s groundbreaking installation for a Bauhaus exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. Going forward they shared a common idea of the possibilities of collaboration and embarked on a long and productive friendship.

Bayer’s ensuing impact on Aspen, from architecture to landscape features to graphic design, is still very much evident today. But it’s also so much a part of Aspen that we may take it for granted, rushing by one of his Earth mounds at the Aspen Institute, say, or ducking into the Hotel Jerome, the Wheeler Opera House or the Music Tent, all of which Bayer worked on at various times. We may have forgotten what we once knew about this incredibly prolific artist, or perhaps never knew.

A new exhibit at the Aspen Institute provides the perfect opportunity to become reacquainted with Bayer’s broad body of work. In December 2013, the retrospective exhibition *The Legacy of Herbert Bayer: Recent Gifts and Loans* opened in the Resnick Gallery of the Doerr-Hosier Center. It includes painting, sculpture, photography, graphic design, printmaking, tapestry, book design and ceramics. The exhibit is a permanent presentation of Bayer’s oeuvre, resulting from the Institute’s commitment to collect, preserve, study and exhibit the work of the artist who designed its buildings. It will continue to evolve as new gifts are donated and loans expire and are replaced. His impact on Aspen will also be explored Saturday, Aug. 2, at an ArtAspen panel moderated by Bayer scholar Gwen Chanzit, of the Denver Art Museum (for details, go to [art-aspen.com](http://art-aspen.com)).

Bayer was born in Austria in 1900. As a boy, he established a strong love for the mountains and the natural world, and later referred to himself as an alpinist. This lifelong affinity contributed to his dislike of big cities and his enthusiasm about his later move to Aspen.

When Paepcke hired Bayer to essentially design modern Aspen, Bayer hit the ground running. In addition to his mission from Paepcke to plan the campus of the nascent Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, he also had ambitions about redesigning the whole town. However, his first architectural project was the original octagonal Sundek restaurant on top of Aspen Mountain.

The forward-thinking design included a radical inverted roof to catch and channel rain and snowmelt for the structure’s heating system.

Paepcke wasn’t so keen on redesigning the town. Bayer wanted at least to coordinate the paint colors of the modest miners’ cabins along Main Street, which didn’t happen, and redo the exterior paint of the Hotel Jerome and add arched eyebrows over the windows, which did. He also completed two remodels of the historic Wheeler Opera House in 1949 and 1960. And Bayer designed all of the original buildings on the Aspen Institute Campus, as well as the first Aspen Music Festival and School tent in 1962. (For more information on all of Bayer’s local buildings, commercial and residential, go to the City of Aspen’s new online guide to mid-20th century architecture, [aspenmod.com](http://aspenmod.com).)

The opportunity to design the Institute campus allowed Bayer to fully realize the Bauhaus ethos, with its focus on function and integration of art, craftsmanship and technology. Working in an idyllic mountain setting and with support from a wealthy and benevolent patron, Bayer was free to design buildings intended for noble intellectual and moral pursuits. These included an art gallery, seminar rooms, an auditorium, a health spa, landscaped earthworks, apartments, a restaurant and a high-tech music and performance venue—truly a humanistic heaven where all the arts are equal, another Bauhaus tenet. Bayer designed everything, down to the little bars of soap in the guest rooms. The Institute was his greatest lifetime masterwork.

He accomplished all of this while pioneering a comprehensive design strategy for Paepcke’s Container Corporation of America in Chicago, including interiors, logos, advertising, letterhead, graphic design, art collecting, packaging and factory architecture. The collaboration was the first of its kind between corporation and artist in the United States. Developing this bold program afforded Bayer the perfect opportunity to implement another Bauhaus ideal, that of an integrated commercial design environment. It also gave CCA the chance to brand itself as the pioneer of a visually sophisticated identity that is the norm today among many companies. Thanks to his Aspen ties, Bayer also completed a major corporate identity makeover for the Atlantic Richfield Company, after meeting CEO Robert O. Anderson at the Aspen Institute in the 1950s.

While working on his projects in Aspen and elsewhere, Bayer also kept up a personal career in painting,

sculpture and tapestry. He was the consummate European professional artist, fastidious and organized, and working long hours every day. He usually wore dress slacks and pressed shirts, and often sported an ascot.

"As a designer, looking at the volume and quality of Herbert Bayer's 70 years of work is breathtaking," comments Aspenite Curt Carpenter. "I suspect discipline, intellect and impeccable craftsmanship are to blame. His work habits were legendary: four hours every morning working on graphic design deadlines, lunch at home or at the Wienerstube, four hours in the studio on Red Mountain making art."

Bayer's dedication to art in all of its forms also led to other design elements that were precursors to ones we use today. For example, as a student of typography and wall painting at the legendary Bauhaus school of architecture and applied arts in Weimar, Bayer designed the universal typeface, a sans serif, lowercase font that embodied the form-follows-function Bauhaus credo. Its use foretold today's prevalence of lowercase in texts and emails.

Bayer's *World Geographic Atlas* was an ambitious project commissioned by CCA as a gift for clients, and it ended up being one of his most spectacular achievements. Working on it from 1948 through 1953, he researched maps with European cartographers. After World War II, many of the world's political borders had changed, so Bayer created a pictorial, rather than textual, portrait of the world and its people. This approach, so gorgeously printed on paper, is a precursor to today's monitor screens with Google Earth.

Bayer probably would have had a more celebrated and profitable career if he had stayed in New York. However, he chose to sacrifice potential art-world acclaim for the serenity and beauty of Aspen. There was also the personal fulfillment of his profoundly creative friendship with Paepcke. That deep connection is evident in the similarity between Paepcke's Aspen Idea and Bayer's artistic code of imbuing every creation with head, hand and heart.

Bayer not only left his legacy on the larger world of design but on an individual level too. One person whom

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—CURT CARPENTER**

Bayer also made influential contributions to 20th century photography. His explorations with photomontage and airbrush were technically innovative, and many of his images are startling and surrealistic. Several, such as a nude man pulling out a slab of his arm and a grove of aspens with eyes on their bark, rate among his best-known works. One might say that with images like these, Bayer laid the foundation for the concept of digital manipulation. His seamlessly executed sequence of shoot, cut, paste, airbrush and reshoot, all so delicately and tediously done, can now be effortlessly accomplished with Photoshop.

Very few artists in the 20th century, including his colleagues from the Bauhaus, truly mastered as many media and techniques as Bayer. But he always considered himself primarily a painter. This art was more personal, outside the influences and trends of the day. His compositions are abstract, either organic or, more often, geometric. Bayer's most important series of paintings—and his final body of work—were his "Anthologies." He created these large, powerful geometric compositions while living in Montecito, Calif., during his last years. They are a combination and summation of the essential formal artistic elements: form, color, line and volume.

he affected in this way was his assistant, Richard Carter, who would go on to become a prolific painter in his own right as well as a founding member of the Aspen Art Museum. Of his first association with Bayer, Carter recounts: "In 1972 I heard from a journalist friend that Herbert Bayer's assistant was leaving and he was kind of frantic to find a replacement. Fresh out of New Jersey, I asked, 'Who's Herbert Bayer?' A quick trip to the library (way pre-Google) brought me up to speed on that subject, and I was more than a bit wowed that a Bauhaus master was living here in Far City."

Carter applied for the job and was hired. "Given his big-time résumé and his somewhat aristocratic demeanor and accent, I wondered if I was up to the task and was admittedly a bit nervous," Carter recalls. Bayer assured his new assistant that he would "learn by doing."

For the next seven years Carter worked with Bayer in his studio in the meadow at the top of Red Mountain and later in Montecito. "Every time I was presented with a task in an unfamiliar discipline, that voice would come in loud and clear: 'You will learn by doing.' I did, and I still do."

It's a fitting tribute to a man whose output many of us still encounter every day in Aspen. ▣

**BAYER'S BAUHAUS** Bayer's  
"landscape," 1982. Designed by  
Walter Gropius, manufactured by  
Rosenthal Studio-Line. Porcelain and  
polychrome, 14 by 14 inches. Gift to  
the Aspen Institute of Melva  
Bucksbaum and Raymond Leorsy

