

Get a quote today (/quote)

Blog

Solar's Retro Future

CHAZ WILKE ([HTTPS://SOLARMEHOME.COM/AUTHOR/CHAZW/](https://solarmehome.com/author/chazw/)) / JUNE 8, 2015 ([HTTPS://SOLARMEHOME.COM/SOLARS-RETRO-FUTURE/](https://solarmehome.com/solars-retro-future/)) / [LEAVE A COMMENT](#) ([HTTPS://SOLARMEHOME.COM/SOLARS-RETRO-FUTURE/#RESPOND](https://solarmehome.com/solars-retro-future/#respond))



As we are now collectively focused on the practical use of photovoltaic solar panels for independent consumer energy production, we may miss the more whimsical applications of solar generated power. We are well on our way to a clean energy future where all our needs might be met by harnessing the sun's golden rays. But 60 years ago, an architecture and design duo from southern California showed the world the sun's power at play.

Charles and Ray Eames are synonymous with design. The two made their mark on the furniture world in the late 1940s with the molded plywood chair and later with the iconic and still wildly popular Eames lounge chair and ottoman [see *right*]. But in 1957, when the Aluminum Corporation of America (ALCOA) asked designers to create a showcase of uses for the new consumer metal, the Eameses decided to submit an entry that also incorporated a relatively unused power source at that time, the sun.

In the video below, you'll see the Eames Solar Do-Nothing Machine in action. The primitive solar energy collection device is a simple array of aluminum sheets funneling the sun's rays into rudimentary solar panels (<http://solarmehome.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/eamesdonothing3-800px.jpg>), a



far cry from modern day photovoltaic advancements. Even with limited conversion efficiency the machine springs to life with a surprising amount of activity:

SOLAR DO-NOTHING MACHINE



Spinning pinwheels, whirring polygonal shapes and long, winding tracks that guide perpetually rolling ball bearings bring this Technicolor symphony of motion to life. While the Solar Do-Nothing Machine might not have satisfied a specific everyday task, in 1957 it ignited the public's imagination of what could be done with the ample energy provided by the sun.



What might be the most brilliant aspect of this large toy is that it achieved the requirements set by the Aluminum Corporation of America while also achieving a personal desire of the Eameses. To show a simple application of the sun's energy with the duo's signature grace and style.

In the recently released An Eames Anthology, author Daniel Ostroff touches on the simplistic, yet revolutionary, approach to using solar energy. "They wanted to show the virtues of solar energy at a time when nobody was thinking about it," says (<http://bit.ly/1lpTGrg>) Ostroff.

"If we could build this lovely, useless little device and power it with sunlight, the Eames seemed to be saying, just imagine the magnificent, useful machines human beings could build if they really put their minds to it," writes (<http://ti.me/1HWQ6SE>) Ben Cosgrove, editor of LIFE.com.

And perhaps that's the most telling aspect of this tale. How solar energy has been on the tip of innovators' tongues for decades. The recent boom in solar energy across the world is long past due. Now, as the world awakens, ready to embrace a future powered by the sun's rays, it helps to remember a time not long ago where harnessing the sun's energy was nothing but a novelty.

Images Courtesy of Eames Office (<http://bit.ly/1lpVzEk>).

Availability of any state, federal, or local programs will vary and are subject to change. Consult with a financial professional before making any decisions. Energy and financial savings are not guaranteed and will vary from customer to customer. The foregoing is provided for informational purposes only and is not expert or professional advice, and should not be relied upon as such. SolarMeHome does not make any recommendations for any particular solar installer or product. SolarMeHome receives payment from participating installers for customer referrals.

◀ EAMES ◀ SOLAR AT PLAY

