National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

1959 Philco Predicta TV



Industrial designers are paid to ask, "How can we make our product more eye appealing and stand out from the competition?" This Philco Model H3410 black and white TV, with a 17-inch picture tube, is a good example of innovative industrial design of the late 1950s. At a time when the space age was just taking off, making products look "futuristic" was something to strive for.

To keep costs down, most late 1950s television sets were housed in rectangular wood, metal, or plastic cabinets without extensive ornamentation. Between 1958 and 1960 Philco marketed a new line of distinctive appearing models called the "Predicta" series. Their key feature was separating the picture tube from the cabinet and allowing it to swivel. Many different models were offered, including a tall pedestal version and another whose separate picture tube, connected to the base unit by a long bulky cable, could be moved around the room. This Predicta was called the "Princess." Other models have names as unrelated as "Siesta" and "Continental."

One reason Philco was able to produce this design was the development of a picture tube with a much shorter neck than had been available previously. (The electron beam in the tube had a high deflection angle.) To protect the picture tubes from damage, they were encased in a tough nearly transparent plastic shield, which gave the screens a slightly greenish tint.

Philco also adopted then-new printed wiring board technology for the Predicta line chassis. Unfortunately these sets proved unreliable. An unexpectedly large number of warranty service calls affected Philco's bottom line. Today, Predictas have a reputation for being tricky to restore and prone to more failures than other sets of the era. Finding a replacement for a failed picture tube is difficult.

The Princess sold for around $280 (about $2300 in today's dollars). Despite their problems, Predicta sets were popular with consumers. Museum visitors often call our Predicta "a really cool-looking TV set!"

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!