

Martin Hirschorn – 1921-2010

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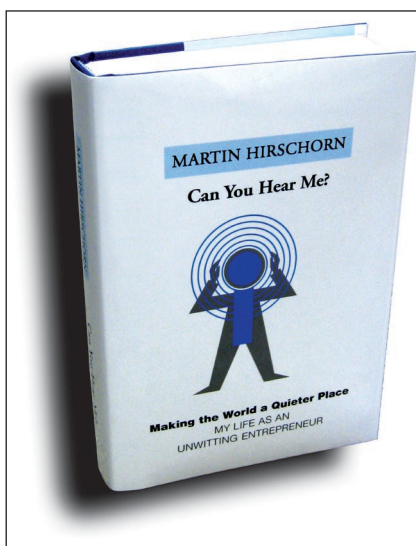
Martin Hirschorn, considered the pioneer of industrial noise control, passed away in New York on June 1, 2010 at the age of 89. His story is one of achievement on a grand scale, of the fulfillment of a lifelong vision by the creation of an innovative and widely respected company adapting and manufacturing noise control methods to meet the needs of new and challenging industries.

From a childhood in near-poverty and, as a Jew growing up in Berlin during the 1930s with little prospect of a better future, Martin Hirschorn built a path to success by a combination of early family support, good fortune, determination and hard work. With the encouragement of his parents (who remained in Berlin) and support from an overseas relative, he emigrated in 1937 to England, where he completed his technical education prior to a second emigration and an engineering and manufacturing career in the United States.

Life in wartime England was not as difficult as he might have thought for one born in enemy Germany, according to Hirschorn. Learning a new language with neither money nor family support, but through a variety of jobs he was able to pay for an education and also to test his inventive skills. Completion of an engineering degree eventually led to his decision to seek the greater opportunities of a career in the post-war industrial growth of the United States. Here, the technical experience gained in England facilitated employment and opportunities to take part in designing new noise control products for industry.

Industrial Acoustics Company, now recognized world-wide as IAC, was launched in 1949 with no resources beyond office space in his aunt's small apartment and his determination to succeed. However, the support of companies interested in his ideas and positive response to an article in an engineering journal paved the way for the first successful IAC products and the decision to combine manufacturing with his demonstrated abilities in noise control design. Hirschorn also developed the other dimensions of a successful enterprise – a clearly understood goal, attracting and keeping strongly motivated, talented employees and economical production methods, with unceasing dedication to the hard work of gaining recognition in the engineering and architectural industry.

There can be no doubt that the timing was fortunate. Expanding commercial aviation, whole new industries and the advent of large-scale air conditioning for buildings brought with them an immediate need for noise control on a large scale. Early success with large industrial silencers led to systems



Martin Hirschorn's autobiography is available from: Acoustical Publications, Bay Village, OH, 2007, hardcover, 6-1/2 x 9-1/4 in., 373 pg., ISBN: 0-9769816-0-2 – \$25 + shipping, www.SandV.com/books/form01

for control of noise from gas turbines and jet engine test cells that became a major IAC product line. In architectural acoustics, air intakes for the first U.S. high-rise, curtain-wall office building were a step toward developing standard products that were economical to produce and suitable for both outdoor and indoor applications.

Advances in the rapidly growing science of acoustics were harnessed to produce reliable and economical devices for the control of noise. An entire range of products was developed to meet the needs of power, manufacturing and building industries. Evaluation of performance through rigorous testing in special facilities led to standard ratings for silencers and other components.

Factory-built enclosures with sound-absorbing linings for noisy machines were assembled from modular panels adaptable to many other uses, including anechoic chambers, audiometric testing booths, music practice rooms and sound-isolating movable partitions. A close examination of any of these systems will demonstrate the level of understanding required to translate a specified acoustical requirement into a completed product, portable and rugged enough for shipping and readily applicable to both traditional and advanced methods of building construction.

Each of these markets required close attention and product evaluation with design refinement if needed, calling for well organized and trained field representatives and sales staff dealing with innovative designs without losing sight of evolving customer needs. During the course of almost a half century, Hirschorn presided over an impressive series of products that set a high standard of quality and reliability, ranging from jet noise suppressors for the Concorde supersonic aircraft and very large anechoic test facilities to special duct silencers for hospitals, sound isolating doors and windows, and even an advanced sound level meter.

With the establishment of a viable nationwide operation, IAC embarked on overseas expansion. The company established manufacturing and sales facilities throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and South Africa. After 49 years of heading the company, Hirschorn found a group willing to buy IAC and the sale was completed in 1998.

Hirschorn gave much credit for the success of his company to his late wife, Alena Wels Hirschorn, and the people in the many facets of IAC who espoused the company goals and made substantial individual contributions to its years of success. He may have said it best during his early years in Berlin, "When I was a child in Germany, my ambition in life was to become an artist, explorer and soldier. I never became a soldier, but I wanted to because the war against Nazi Germany was very much my own. However, in 1949 I may have become an explorer of ideas and possibly a creative artist when I started Industrial Acoustics Company – IAC – in New York City at 28." There is no doubt that Martin Hirschorn achieved his dream many times over.

His life story provides an insight into how a dedicated group with applied ingenuity in acoustics and practical understanding of engineering systems and customer needs can successfully stay ahead of both competitors and imitators for half a century. That is a magnificent accomplishment. 