

Zig-Zag Chairs and Wobbly Mirrors: Twentieth-Century Furniture from the RISD Museum,
February 7, 2003-April 27, 2003

The breadth and depth of RISD's furniture collection make it one of the Museum's greatest treasures. The tradition that began with Charles L. Pendleton's extraordinary bequest of American colonial furniture in 1904 continues today through a lively acquisition program of work by individual studio furnituremakers and by leading designers working with manufacturers.

This exhibition makes evident the variety and vitality to furnituremaking in the 20th century, bringing into focus the similarities and differences of factory-produced furniture and unique work made in artists' studios. One of the dominant issues is designing for mass production and consumption versus realizing a design as a single or very limited edition. The use of traditional materials as opposed to the newest materials and technology is another focus in modern furniture design, along with the pull of functionalism against humanistic interests in history, decoration, irony, and humor. These and many other concerns demonstrated by the work in this exhibition are what makes furniture such a remarkable lens through which to view design during the last century.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Leroy Schuette, American, b. 1951

Linda Schiwall, b. 1960

Wobbly Mirror, 1986-1987

Mahogany, gilding, reverse-painted glass, blown glass with inclusions

Acquired through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Darald R. Libby,
Worcester, MA 1987.114

Schuette and Schiwall-Gallo have given a literal "twist" to the ca. 1820 table top mirror. The "fun house" shape is perfectly complemented by the dazzling 23 karat gilded surface and sparkling silver-blue glass marbles. The exuberance of these elements evokes the atmosphere of a Maine amusement park that Schuette had in mind as he worked.

Schuette would have seen related period mirrors in the Museum's Pendleton collection as a RISD student in John Dunnigan's furniture-history class. Like the painted surfaces of Tom Loeser's Folding Chair (no.), the Wobbly Mirror reflects the influence of the brightly colored, playful "anti-rational" style of the 1980s Italian group of artists known as Memphis.

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Thomas Loeser, American, b. 1956

Folding Chair, 1988

Birch plywood, enamel paint, stainless steel, maple

Museum purchase with the aid of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Felicia Fund 1988.063

Loeser, a second-generation studio furnituremaker, was challenged to solve a geometric puzzle: create a folding chair that could be mass-produced from one sheet of plywood. Exploration of this man-made material and interest in unlimited replication are new to studio furnituremaking in the late 20th century, although these have been the concerns of modern production designers since the turn of the century. Loeser's painted surface is also new to studio furnituremaking, whose founding practitioners focused on using wood in its natural state. The colorful early 1980s "anti-rational designs" of Italy's Memphis group, reiterating the Pop movement, opened up the possibilities of color for Loeser and other designs such as Lee Schuette and Linda Schiwall-Gallo (no.).



Raymond William Olson, American, 1907 - 1987, (RISD BFA 1924)

Folding screen, 1933

Plywood, paint

Gift of Kay Olson Freeman and Gwendolyn Olson Van Norden
1989.020

In a summary of his work, Olson expressed the classic dilemma of modernist architects: "Design concepts have changed with new construction techniques and I have changed with them. However, I still retain my respect for the "old" work of [William Morris] Hunt, [Ralph Adams] Cram, McKim, Meade and White, Charles Platt...." Olsen's architectural work, such as this interior screen, demonstrates that he was more comfortable with historical styles than modernist functionalism. The geometric abstraction of nature and exotic imagery are classic elements of Art Deco styling that co-existed with functional modernism but remained surface decoration.

Robert Trotman, American, b. 1947

Table with Walking Figures, 1989-1990

Basswood with dye

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 1990.024

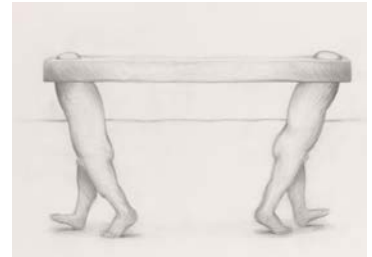
Many layers of meaning attach to this enigmatic table. Are the two men trying to walk away from each other in a short-circuited duel,



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never able to change their distance because of a common burden? Does it refer to table legs that have legs of their own, perhaps a post-modern version of the classic cabriole leg that extends into a foot with claws? All of these ideas and many more are appropriate to this table by poet-turned-furnituremaker Trotman, who has said, "I am interested in the place where mind and matter meet, in the difference between subject and object, the object-ness of persons and the person-ness of objects."

Robert Trotman, American, b. 1947
Study for Table with Walking Figures, 1989
Graphite on wove paper
Gift of the artist 1990.072



Kristina W. Madsen, American, b. 1955
Window seat, 1991
Wenge, holly, maple
Acquired through the generosity of funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts 1991.015

Hand-carved decoration is a new element for studio furnituremaking in its second generation, as it is for 20th-century furniture design as a whole. Ornament had been rejected by the early modernists particularly for its incompatibility with machine production, but also for its connection with historical design.

Madsen's subtle geometric patterning reflects her study of traditional carving in the Fiji Islands, an interest inspired by images in a museum exhibition catalogue and pursued through an extraordinary apprenticeship on the Islands. This native art is a male bastion among the Fijians, but Madsen was welcomed by some of its foremost practitioners.

American
Shaker Rocking Chair, early 1900s
maple; cotton
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 1992.015

This rocking chair is one of thousands made by the Shakers of Mt. Lebanon for sale to the "world's people." Members of this religious group lived communally and largely apart from the outside world in

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order to devote themselves to their beliefs. Every Shaker community had a shop that made furniture for use within the village, but Mt. Lebanon owned vast stands of timber and was the only Shaker group to mass produce furniture to sale.

The tenets of their faith require that Shakers seek simplicity in everything they did, giving their full measure of devotion to heavenly rather than earthly matters. This outlook was extremely practical in communal living because ornamentation made extra work for both the maker and for the user who had to clean and maintain the living quarters. Strong but lightweight furniture was essential because rooms often served multiple purposes. All of these features made Shaker furniture appealing to 20th-century designers seeking functional alternatives to complex designs, such as the bentwood rocker (no.) made around the same time as this Shaker example.

Eck Follen, American, b. 1953, (RISD MFA 1990)

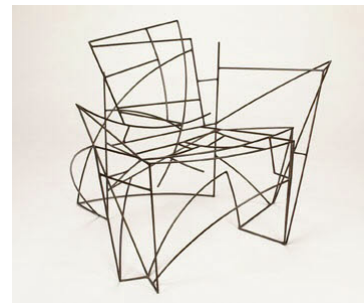
Musical Chair, 1993

Steel rod

Funded in part by a grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the Mary B. Jackson Fund 1994.008

The work of studio furnituremakers, including Follen, is in part a reaction to the enormous mid-20th-century growth in the use of man-made materials and in the consumption of natural resources to produce them. This is especially true of the first generation of studio furnituremakers, who very consciously returned to natural materials, particularly wood (nos. Esherick, Frid). Sadly, more recent furnituremakers have faced a depletion of that resource, as old-growth forests are ravaged by mechanical harvesting.

Musical Chair was Follen's entry in the 1993 exhibition *Conservation By Design*, organized in response to that crisis by The RISD Museum and the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection (WARP). The title of Follen's chair recalls the children's game in which players scramble for an insufficient number of seats when the music stops. Follen may be saying that if alternatives to clear cutting are not pursued now, we might all be left without a chair.



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Roberto Matta, Chilean, 1911-2002
Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-
Malitte Seating System, 1966
Polyurethane foam, stretch wood upholstery
Gift of Tom McHugh 1997.2

Just as Pop art comments on “low” versus “high” art, Matta’s seating system critiques “classic” modern furniture. Its soft, amoeboid forms are the antithesis of the rational, functional designs of Mies van der Rohe and Rietveld (nos.). Pop art appealed to youth rebelling against “The Establishment” in the 1960s. This piece is lightweight and can be stacked into a cube when not in use. The portability of the Malitte seating system was well suited to those with a freer lifestyle and a wariness of the suburban “Dream House” and the values it symbolized.



Roberto Matta, Chilean, 1911-2002; d. 2002
Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-
Malitte Seating System, 1966
Polyurethane foam with stretch wool upholstery
Gift of Tom McHugh 1997.2.1

Just as Pop art comments on “low” versus “high” art, Matta’s seating system critiques “classic” modern furniture. Its soft, amoeboid forms are the antithesis of the rational, functional designs of Mies van der Rohe and Rietveld (nos.). Pop art appealed to youth rebelling against “The Establishment” in the 1960s. This piece is lightweight and can be stacked into a cube when not in use. The portability of the Malitte seating system was well suited to those with a freer lifestyle and a wariness of the suburban “Dream House” and the values it symbolized.



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Polyurethane foam with stretch wool upholstery
Gift of Tom McHugh 1997.2.3

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Roberto Matta, Chilean, 1911-2002; d. 2002
Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-
Malitte Seating System, 1966
Polyurethane foam with stretch wool upholstery
Gift of Tom McHugh 1997.2.4

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Roberto Matta, Chilean, 1911-2002; d. 2002
Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-
Malitte Seating System, 1966
Polyurethane foam with stretch foam upholstery
Gift of Tom McHugh 1997.2.5

Just as Pop art comments on "low" versus "high" art, Matta's seating system critiques "classic" modern furniture. Its soft, amoeboid forms



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Charles Swanson, American, 1953-, (RISD MFA 1989)

Writing Table, 1990

Pau amarello, aluminum, and masonite

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 1997.65.1

Swanson often chooses innovative materials for his work, as in this writing table and chair. Through his comfort with mixed media, he expands the boundaries of studio furnituremaking well beyond wood.



Charles Swanson, American, 1953-, (RISD MFA 1989)

Chair, 1990

Pau amarello, aluminum, tempered fiberboard

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 1997.65.2

Swanson often chooses innovative materials for his work, as in this writing table and chair. Through his comfort with mixed media, he expands the boundaries of studio furnituremaking well beyond wood.



Eero Saarinen, American, 1910-1961

Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-

Tulip Armchair (model 150), 1955-1956

Fiberglass-reinforced plastic, cast aluminum, wool

Gift of The Athenaeum Bookbinders 1998.32

Architect Eero Saarinen wrote of his monopode (single footed) furniture designs: “The undercarriage of chairs and tables in a typical interior makes an ugly, confusing, unrestful world. I wanted to clear up the slum of legs.” Reinforced plastic was the ideal material for his molded shell designs incorporating seat, back, and arms in a single form to create the visual and functional unity found in earlier cantilever designs.



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Jere Osgood, American, 1936-

Summer '99 Shell Desk, 1999

Bubinga wood, wenge wood, satinwood, brass, and water-buffalo calfskin

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1999.30

Jere Osgood, like John Dunnigan (no.), studied with Tage Frid (no.), one of the originators of the studio furniture movement, when Frid was teaching at the School for American Craftsmen of the Rochester Institute of Technology. Osgood, as a founding co-director of the Program in Artisanry at Boston University, has passed along this training and his own innovations to many in the second generation of studio furnituremakers, including Timothy Philbrick (no.).

Osgood's work differs markedly from that of his mentor because Frid believed that technique determined design, whereas Osgood is known for creating a design and inventing an appropriate technique to realize it when necessary. A classic example is the graceful curve of the legs on this desk. They are made by a process called "compound stave lamination": boards are sawn into strips then glued together in a mold to reprogram them into curves along two axes. The technique wastes less wood, and the result is stronger and less subject to warpage than traditional milled-to-thickness lumber.



Charles Eames, American, 1907-1978

Ray Eames, American, 1912-1988

Evans Products Co., American, 1946-49

Herman Miller Furniture Co., American, 1923-

FSW (Folding Screen Wood), 1946

Molded plywood, birch veneer, canvas

Jesse Metcalf Fund 1999.56

The undulating shape of this screen's panels, which is echoed in its overall form, stabilizes it and provides an organic, humanized contrast to unornamented modern architecture. Twentieth-century building materials allowed open interiors, since fewer supporting walls were necessary. This also created a need for temporary, moveable partitions. The folding screen was available in various heights and lengths. Canvas sandwiched between the plywood layers connects the sections and provides unusual flexibility and ease of arrangement, unlike traditional hinges (no. –Olson screen).



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Charles Eames, American, 1907-1978
Ray Eames, American, 1912-1988
Herman Miller Furniture Co., American, 1923-
ESU (Eames Storage Unit) (model 270-C), 1950
Steel, plywood, plastic, paint, and brass casters
Gift of Samuel Cate 1999.86

Charles Eames was an architect, and the steel frame and prefabricated parts of this design strongly reflect the lessons of modern architecture. Indeed, the Eames's own home bears a striking resemblance to their designs for the storage unit series. Flexible, open floor plans required equally flexible furnishings. The interchangeable leg and frame components, as well as the various drawers, cabinets, and shelves that the Eameses designed for the ESU, fitted the need perfectly. This example was owned and used by a Providence architect.



Timothy S. Philbrick, American, b. 1952
Asymmetrical Table, 1998
Cuban mahogany
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 1999.87.1

This table alludes to the work of the 18th-century Townsend and Goddard families of cabinetmakers in Newport, Rhode Island (examples are on view in the Museum's Pendleton House), and 1920s French Art Deco style. It demonstrates Philbrick's appreciation of historical furniture design, but more importantly, it also makes clear his understanding of proportion as a key element of good design, regardless of style.



Philbrick trained with restorers of historic furniture before obtaining his Certificate of Mastery in 1978 from Boston University's Program in Artisanry. In Boston he studied with Jere Osgood (no.), whose development of innovative woodworking techniques made him a leader among the second generation of studio furnituremakers. These artists were removed enough in time from the modernist rejection of historical revivals to accept the lessons to be learned from every era of furniture design.

Josef Hofmann Successeurs, Austrian
Rocking Chair, ca. 1893-1900
Beech, cane, paint
Gift of Ira Rakatansky and Lenore Gray 2000.108

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The technology of bending wood to make strong, lightweight furniture parts was familiar to chairmakers of the 18th century and was improved dramatically in the last half of the 19th century. Early 20th-century designers such as Alver Aalto (no.) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohn (no.) admired late-19th-century bentwood chairs because they had fewer joints and a minimum of applied ornament and so could be produced on a mechanized assembly line by the million. Bentwood furniture is still popular today.

John Dunnigan, American, b. 1950, (RISD MFA 1980)
Vestigial Bonheur du Jour and Chair, 1997-2000
mahogany; cedar; pine; brass
Jesse Metcalf Fund 2000.14.1

"Bonheur du jour" ("happiness of the day") is the name for a type of late 18th-century French lady's writing table with an upper cabinet usually closed by reeded shutters (tambours). Made for educated upper-class women out of costly woods beautifully fitted and ornamented, the design was often used for dressing tables as well. A lady's desk of ca. 1800, attributed to Boston makers John and Thomas Seymour, can be seen in the second-floor galleries of Pendleton House. Dunnigan, who is now a professor in RISD's Furniture Design department, would have known this example as a RISD student of Tage Frid (no.). Dunnigan's in-depth study of the historical form made this work an ideal candidate for a Museum commission. His desk is intentionally difficult to use for writing, an ironic comment on a lost art.



John Dunnigan, American, b. 1950, (RISD MFA 1980)
Vestigial Bonheur du Jour and Chair, 2000
mahogany
Jesse Metcalf Fund 2000.14.2

"Bonheur du jour" ("happiness of the day") is the name for a type of late 18th-century French lady's writing table with an upper cabinet usually closed by reeded shutters (tambours). Made for educated upper-class women out of costly woods beautifully fitted and ornamented, the design was often used for dressing tables as well. A lady's desk of ca. 1800, attributed to Boston makers John and Thomas Seymour, can be seen in the second-floor galleries of Pendleton House. Dunnigan, who is now a professor in RISD's Furniture Design department, would have known this example as a RISD student of Tage Frid (no.). Dunnigan's in-depth study of the historical form made this work an ideal candidate for a Museum commission. His desk is intentionally difficult to use for writing, an ironic comment on a lost art.



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Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, American, b. Germany, 1886-1969

MR 10 Chair, designed 1927

Chrome-plated tubular steel, woven cane (rattan)

Gift of the Department of Architecture 2000.49

Mies van der Rohn was one of the most influential architects and designers of the 20th century. He understood well the importance of industrial production and functionalism for design. The dominance of steel and concrete in modern architecture is reflected here in Mies's use of tubular steel. This material, newly engineered for use in bicycle frames, was more resilient than the welded pipe previously in use.

The chair's streamlined design fits perfectly into the world of planes, trains, and automobiles, in striking contrast to the historical revival designs equally popular at the time. Objects derived from "Colonial" sources, such as Wallace Nutting's turned stool (no.), were just what Mies and his contemporaries opposed in their vision of the 20th-century home as a "machine for living."



Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, Dutch, 1888-1964

Gerard van de Groenekan, Dutch, 1904-1994; fl. 1917-1971

Zig-Zag chair, 1941

Elm with steel screws

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2001.2

This striking chair is an unusual combination of studio furnituremaking and design for production. Rietveld described it as a "designer joke" because of the discrepancy between its simple shape and relatively complicated construction. His interest in that contrast may have been why he chose to have his cabinetmaker, Gerard van de Groenekan, continue to produce the chair in his shop after the design had been sold to the Metz Manufacturing Company. The Metz versions have a slicker look than this Groenekan example. Their reflective finishes and rare wood veneers disguise the traditional joinery and mechanical aids such as the long bolts connecting the seat to the back. Ironically, the manufacturer altered the simpler "manufactured" quality that Rietveld seems to have intended.



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Verner Panton, Danish, 1926-1998
Plus-linje, Danish, 1959-
Heart cone chair, 1958-1959
Aluminum, steel, plastic, and wool upholstery
Museum Acquisition Fund 2002.23

Like many 20th-century furniture designers, Verner Panton trained as an architect. He shared this with mid-century modernist Charles Eames (nos.) and Eero Saarinen (no.), as well as their interest in state-of-the-art technology. That concern made Panton differ from many of his fellow Danish craftsmen, who chose to work with natural materials and more traditional designs. In 1967, his heat-molded plastic seating was the first chair ever to be mass-produced in a single piece.

In spite of his technological bent, Panton's designs have a playful, human quality – what could be warmer in feeling than this red heart shape? – that links him to the best of Danish Modern design, beginning with Alvar Aalto (no.).



Shaw-Walker Company, American, ca. 1890-1974
Side chair, ca. 1945
Anodized aluminum, cherry
Gift of Fernande Ross 2002.38

The original, all-aluminum version of this chair by EMECO (Electric Machine and Equipment Co.) was designed for the U.S. Navy in 1944. Aluminum was extraordinarily expensive to produce until the availability of electrical power was increased during and after World War II (1939-1945). The many wartime uses for this lightweight, noncorrosive metal raised production levels and postwar use tremendously. These same properties have made it a popular choice for outdoor furniture and use in commercial settings. Aluminum chairs, like most all-metal furniture, have never been favored for use inside the home or office. This manufacturer compromised by substituting wood for the seat, front legs, and back slats.



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Leon Ransmeier, Inc., American, 1979-
Old Rocker, 2001
Maple, plywood, molded polyurethane
Gift of Leon Ransmeier 2002.96

Like the adjacent Wobbly Mirror (no.), Leon Ransmeier's *Old Rocker* has a "fun house" quality. The bright-red molded polyurethane rockers flatten out under weight, challenging the sitter to stay seated (see photo). Ransmeier invites us to rethink what at first appears to be just another adaptation of the Shaker ladder-back rocker (no.). As a ubiquitous part of the late 20th-century revival of traditional colonial designs – generically, "American Country" style – the contemporary ladder-back chair has lost all connection with the religious ideals that gave functional integrity and simplicity to the original Shaker interpretation of the form.



Wallace Nutting, American, 1861-1941
Stool, ca. 1924-1926
Maple, rush
Museum Collection 26.428.1

The design of this stool is based on a form that was common in 17th-century England and its American colonies. Wallace Nutting was a collector and dealer in early American furniture who knew the Museum's renowned Pendleton House collection well. Nutting was also an entrepreneur whose company helped popularize the Colonial Revival style through the production of furniture, books, and photographs. He employed as many as 25 workers, and his venture was in many ways the opposite of studio furniture making, which focused on the natural qualities of wood and puts a premium on skilled craftsmanship. The studio-furniture movement nonetheless owes a debt to the popularization of traditional designs and materials advocated by Nutting and other Colonial Revivalists. Nutting's stool was one of four purchased in 1926 to be used as seating in the Museum's galleries.

Judy Kensley McKie, American, b. 1944, (RISD BFA 1966)
Toy Chest, 1980
Limewood
The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th Century American Art
81.024

McKie's statement that "the wood is important, but the wood is not the idea" characterizes studio furnituremaking as it matured in the second generation, in much the same way that Jere Osgood's work



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(no.) demonstrates that technique need not dictate form.

McKie's carving stems from a desire to make objects more personal – "more like a gift for someone that you love" – and as with Kristina Madsen (no.), it stems from a keen interest in the traditional: in this case, early-American dowry chests, including examples similar to those found in The RISD Museum's Pendleton House.

Charles Eames, American, 1907-1978
Ray Eames, American, 1912-1988
Evans Products Co., American, 1946-49
Leg Splint, 1941-1942
Molded plywood
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Armand Versaci 81.045



In 1942, Charles and Ray Eames succeeded in their experiments to create a machine that could form plywood curved in more than one plane. In naming their invention the "Kazam! Machine," the couple demonstrated their sense of humor and perhaps some of the effect of Hollywood on the 20th-century culture. Not only had Charles worked in the film industry, but the couple made their own films and at the time were living in Los Angeles. A wartime commission from the U.S. Navy to design plywood leg and arm splints and litters put the machine to its first serious test. After World War II, the Eameses transferred the technology to furniture design (nos.).

Charles Eames, American, 1907-1978
Ray Eames, American, 1912-1988
Herman Miller Furniture Co., American, 1923-
DCM (Dining Chair Metal), 1946
plywood; chrome; ebony stained
Gift of Bertrand Surprenant 81.158



Following World War II, the Eameses redeployed their new compound-curved plywood technology from medical splints to chairs. They also employed neoprene – a synthetic rubber developed in 1931 – to make the joining of legs to seat more shock absorbent and the chair more comfortable. The emphasis on comfort and the use of wood show the influence of early modern designer Alver Aalto (no.) This chair was one of a group for which the Eameses were lauded in a 1946 Arts and Architecture magazine for "a compound a aesthetic brilliance and technical inventiveness."

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Tage Frid, American, b. Denmark, 1915-2004, (RISD Faculty 1962-1985, Furniture)

Stool, 1982

Walnut

Gift of the Rhode Island School of Design Class of 1982 82.178

An emphasis on the natural qualities of wood makes the work of Tage Frid, Wharton Esherick (no.), and others in the first generation of studio furnituremakers very different from that of their predecessors. Historically, joiners and cabinetmakers sought to create variety and value through different finishes and forms of ornamentation. Studio furnituremakers, however, were very much like earlier practitioners in their return of small workshops and a direct connection with materials.



Tage Frid has had a tremendous impact on studio furnituremaking, first at the Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Craftsman, where Jere Osgood (no.) studied with him, and later as the head of RISD's woodworking program from 1962 to 1985, when John Dunnigan (no.) trained with him in the late 1970s. Dunnigan and Osgood are just two of the many that continue Frid's legacy through their work and the work of their students, such as Leon Ransmeier (no.).

Alvar Aalto, Finnish, 1898-1976

Oy Huonekalu-ja Rakennustyötehdas AB, Finnish, 1910 -

Armchair (model 31), 1931-32

Laminated birch and paint

Museum Collection 84.018

Trained as an architect, Alvar Aalto originally created this chair to furnish the Paimio Sanatorium (1929-32) that he designed. Combining architecture and interior decoration into a rational, functional whole was a concern of 20th-century architects; but Aalto stood apart in his use of softened, organic forms and wood. His humanistic approach inspired a new generation of designers, including Charles and Ray Eames (nos. -).



Although plywood – layers of wood glued together with the grains crossways – had been known for decades, 20th-century ski manufacturers developed new types of lamination that allowed thin layers of wood to be bound to each other with grains running parallel. These technologies enabled Aalto to create a strong, flexible wood cantilever frame, doing away with the rear seat supports necessary to earlier bentwood chairs.

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Charles Eames, American, 1907-1978
Ray Eames, American, 1912-1988
Herman Miller Furniture Co., American, 1923-
RAR (Rocking Armchair Rod), 1948
fiberglass; steel; cotton; wood
Gift of Barry Friedman and Patricia Pastor 84.233.1

Fiberglass-reinforced plastic (sometimes called “airplane plastic”) was another wartime development that the Eameses embraced. This durable, lightweight material was what they have sought for a decade in order to mold a full-size (rather than child-sized) shell for a body-surrounding “easy chair” design. After numerous experiments in metal and plywood, they found that this plastic was far easier and less expensive to use, answering their aim “to get the most of the best to the greatest number of the people for least.”



Vico Magistretti, Italian, 1920-60
Poggi, Italian
Golem Chair, 1969
Lacquered wood, plastic seat with vinyl upholstery, metal screws
Gift of Barry Friedman and Patricia Pastor 84.233.4

The solemn animation of this dramatic chair gives it a living presence like the golem of its name, an artificial human being endowed with life, according to Hebrew tradition. In assigning it a title that speaks to the body’s connection with furniture, Magistretti illuminates the humanization of late 20th-century design. Such a name is contrary to the earlier use of initials and numbers (ESU, model 270 C, no. ?) or purely descriptive titles such as Zig-Zag (no.).



Magistretti’s chair reflects functional as well as historical concerns. The pared-down throne-like seat can be linked to many sources, including designs by Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Scottish, 1868-1928) and Frank Lloyd Wright (American, 1867-1959).

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Ole Wanscher, Danish, 1903-1985
P. Jeppesen Mobelfabrik, Danish
armchair, 1949
Rosewood and caning
Gift of Dr. Dorothy Lieberman 85.191

Made of wood and other natural materials and designed with reference to traditional functional designs such as the Shaker ladder-back (no.), this armchair is a classic of the Danish Modern style.

Wanscher trained as a furnituremaker at the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts. He was also an art historian like his father, Vilhelm, and his many publications on furniture history indicate the great depth of knowledge he drew on in his design work. In addition to traditional Western forms, this chair design reflects an awareness of classic Chinese furniture of the Ming dynasty.



Cantilever, Bent Wood, and Bent Metal

William S. Hammersley, American, b. 1950
Rocking Stool, 1979
Laminated ash
Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and gift of David Carter in honor of Elizabeth Burroughs Woodhouse and Eleanor Fayerweather 1989.003

William Hammersley's cantilever design combines a 20th-century taste for functional simplicity with a traditional Western saddle form, seating that must be comfortable for hours at a time. Hammersley has successfully fused the ideas behind the bentwood of the Josef Hofmann Succesieurs rocker (no.) and Mies van der Rohe's cantilever chair (no.) with the studio furnituremaker's concern for the beauty of wood into a very personal expression.



Danish Strains

Le Klint, Danish, 1943-
Hanging Lamp, ca. 1950
Folded and sewn paper, oak, steel, paint
Gift of Samuel M. Cate 2000.68

Geometry is often at the core of rational, functional modernism. The folded paper lampshade is a study in geometry but, in keeping with the Danish Modern preferences for naturalism in design, is made of paper instead of a synthetic material such as plastic.



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New Materials

Harry Bertoia, American, b. Italy, 1915-1978

Knoll International, Inc., American, 1938-

Diamond chair, ca. 1952

Lacquered steel frame, formed fiberglass, cotton tweed upholstery
Abby Rockefeller Mauze Fund 82.273

Harry Bertoia's work as a sculptor and jeweler preceded his interest in using metal in furniture design. Shortages caused by World War II (1939-1945) prevented him from working in steel until industrial production could be converted to consumer goods. The wide, sculptural form of the Diamond Chair is a response to 20th-century open-plan architecture. The use of steel wire in a network of small diamonds complements the overall form of the chair, as well as acknowledging the structural steel that allowed 20th-century architects to design with fewer walls and larger interior spaces.



Pop

Roy Lichtenstein, American, 1923-1997

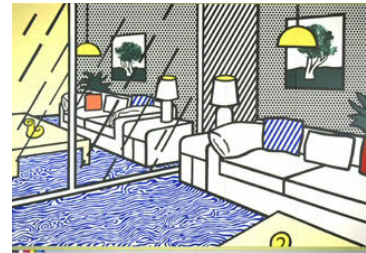
Gemini G.E.L.

Interior with Blue Floor, 1992

screen print

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 1993.004

Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, like Andy Warhol, drew inspiration from the "low art" aspects of contemporary life – advertising, comics, television – as a counterpoint to "high art." This wallpaper points to the triteness of designs conveyed every day to millions by mass production and mass marketing. Is this a hotel or a home?



Tradition Renewed and Revived

Wharton Esherick, American, 1887-1970

Music stand, 1962

Cherry wood

The Felicia Fund 1988.002

Wharton Esherick was at the forefront of the American studio furniture movement of the 1950s and 60s. Trained as a painter, sculptor, and printmaker, Esherick began to work with wood when he could not find frames to suit his paintings.

"Woodworker" was the term often applied to the first generation of studio furnituremakers because of their reverence for the inherent structural, visual, and tactile properties of wood. In part, this



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appreciation was a reaction to the overwhelming presence of man-made materials in the production of all consumer goods, including furniture, after the end of World War II in 1945. The enormous growth of manufacturing capacity, another result of the war, also caused these woodworkers to place a premium on skilled craftsmanship.