

product design

NeoCon 2014: Selected Works – Part 1

by Robert Allen

Ed. Note: Robert Allen periodically joins our journal to provide a designer's perspective. His education and experience as a Harvard-trained architect, interior design professor and accomplished furniture designer whose own product designs have distinguished themselves in the marketplace, provides a keen eye and perspective that is highly informative. His focus is intended to feature products of particular interest to him, rather than a more general survey. Accordingly, he often reviews products that fall outside the larger, well-publicized product launches and we think his observations expand our understanding of both the products he reviews and of the processes and considerations of product design in general.

Kai Conference Table by Nucraft
(www.nucraft.com)

Designer: Joey Ruiter

I chose to lead off with this product because what impressed me most about the undertaking was the inherent optimism its development suggests.

While companies again this year continued to fill out their product lines with offerings that meet the competitor's profile in the bid package – open-space residential seats and tables, benches, and the like – relatively few have ventured far into expensive product that takes risks, asking less about the ROI than how delighted an end user might be in experiencing the product's intangible qualities, even knowing it perhaps only targets a small audience. This product challenges many assumptions and does so with confidence.

Kai won Gold in the Best of Neocon competition in its category and rightly so – it was stunning. The product is minimal but far from 'simple', a trait that's hard to strike amidst the complexities of all the parties involved in taking a product to market. I was immediately taken by the clean resolve and quiet stature of the table and its straightforward legs. Much of the effect is achieved by an ultrathin profile (5/16") and delicate knife-edge, allowing the table to "float" visually.

This is made possible by applying veneer directly to aluminum plate, which Mr. Ruiter affirms is an art form unto itself. The aluminum plate not only gives the table its inherent stability, but provides a continuous under-mount anchoring surface.

Rightly anticipating power-data delivery's rapid evolution in the workplace, he provides a straightforward module that under-mounts wherever needed and carries the power out from the hard-wired center to the easy-to-reach outer edge of the surface (designed to meet Chicago and New York Codes) – necessary now, but removable later when wireless becomes standard practice.

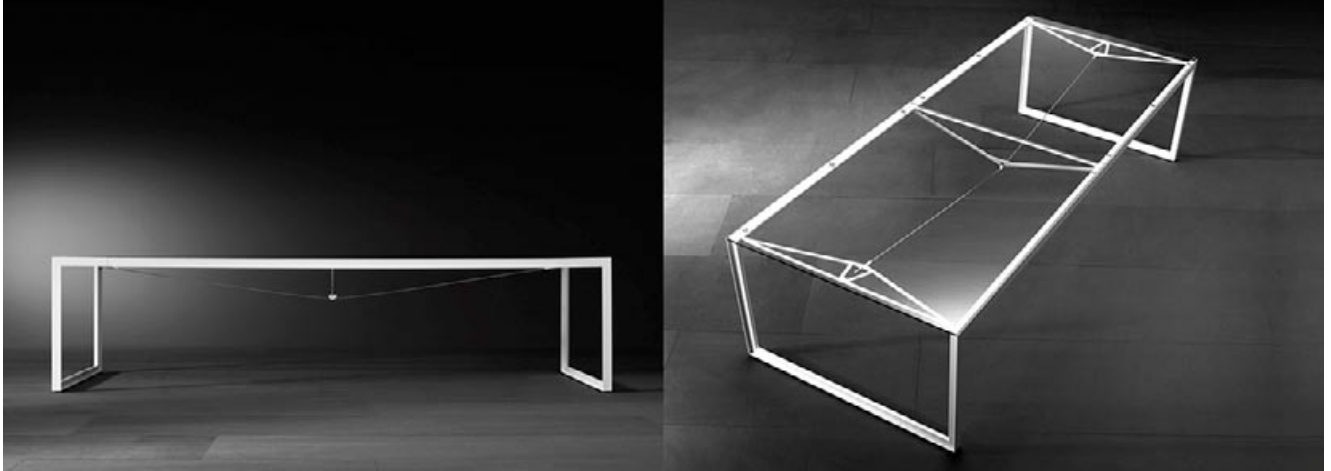


REMOVABLE POWER-DATA MODULE



JOEY RUITER; KAI TABLE WITH TESANO CREDENZA TO LEFT

product design

**K_SYSTEM BY GABRIEL TEIXIDO AT RIVIERA/GRUPO PERMASA**

In 2010 I featured a table by Spanish Designer Gabriel Teixido as part of his “K_system” for Riviera/Grupo Permasa. (See *officeInsight*, www.officeinsight.com/1196). Kai builds nicely on that effort by further delineating the truss. Kai features two trusses, both chromed and handsomely articulated. By adding an aluminum underbody and camber rail structure, Mr. Ruiter and the Nucraft team have been able to make the table broader, bring the legs in-board to let the top appear to float, and most important, provide the rakish knife-edge.

Again, final credit goes to Nucraft for advancing such explorations in the current tentative market milieu. Bob Surman, product development manager, remarked, “It’s always fun to give Joey Ruiter a design brief and see what comes back. We give him free rein to translate our words to his designs.” There are not many companies simply asking for “what is stunning” despite the costs. That’s optimism at its best.

<5_MY Chair by Coalesse (www.coalesse.com)

Designer: Michael Young

Another smart and innovative effort emerged out of Neocon, this time from Coalesse: the US introduction of the <5_MY Chair by Hong Kong-based designer Michael Young. Like Kai, this is also a premium, possibly smaller-run item, but equally as charged from a product design perspective.

An ultra-lightweight (under 5 lbs., thus the name ‘less than five’) stacking chair, it is capable of supporting 300 lbs. and is intended for both indoor and outdoor use, made entirely of handcrafted carbon fiber and customizable.

**FROM LEFT, MICHAEL YOUNG; PROTOTYPE SHOWING CUSTOM PAINT; 4-HIGH STACKING CAPABILITY**

product design



FROM LEFT, LIGHTLIGHT CHAIR BY ALBERTO MEDA; PLOOOP CHAIR BY TIMOTHY SCHREIBER; MOOT BY ROSS LOVEGROVE

This is not the first time carbon fiber has been used for seating (Alberto Meda, *"Lightlight Chair"* for Alias, 1987; Timothy Schreiber, *"Plooop Chair"* for Fi-Tech, 2011; and Ross Lovegrove, *"Moot"* in 2013, to name a few). But this product realization is remarkably affordable – a claim carbon-fiber product is rarely able to make.

I was fortunate enough to find a moment to hear how the product came together from Coalesse Director of Global Design John Hamilton, who worked with Mr. Young from the onset on this undertaking. Mr. Hamilton first met Mr. Young when he was the Steelcase design director for Asia-Pacific and was intrigued by an elaborate carbon-fiber chair, the *"Shindo Chair"* (starting list price \$2775), that Mr. Young had designed,



SHINDO CHAIR BY MICHAEL YOUNG

and approached him about developing a commercial version for Steelcase.

When asked what the objective of the chair was, Mr. Hamilton simply stated that the intent was not to make one more gallery-worthy carbon chair, but to take what is a very expensive, but intelligent material and engineer a solution that made it viable for larger-scale production, or as he put it, "an industrialized solution at a price-point that's affordable." The 'brief' was clear: make it approachable, meet a weight limit of 5 lbs, and make it stackable.

To achieve this, Steelcase committed the resources of their engineering group to make a premium chair that is lighter and costs less, by using less material. With the assistance of Kurt Heidmann's team in Grand Rapids using FEA (Finite Element Analysis) modeling, they were able to calibrate the members of the chair down to their optimal profile, meeting all code requirements while not using an ounce more material than was necessary. Hamilton notes, "Four of them in a box will weigh less than 25 pounds, which is pretty amazing, especially in consideration of the UPS 70 lbs. weight limit."

The design of the chair is minimal and intelligent. The designer, Michael Young, originally from the UK, started his career by working with luminaries such as Tom Dixon and soon established a suc-

cessful design practice in Europe with clients such as the Pompidou Museum and Conran Shop (Sir Terrance Conran selected Young as the Most Inspirational British Designer in 1997). In 2006, however, he shifted gears and took up quarters in Asia, largely driven by his passion for pioneering technology. His present studio is recognized as a leading design company in Asia, known for pushing the boundaries of experimental design in products that reach across and into many fields and industries.

What I like about this effort is the commitment this product makes to 'craft' using the tableau of 21st century technology. Its engineered optimization, paired with its traditional lay-up and polishing method of cutting-edge materials, suggest that mechanization has its role, as does human finesse. The final touch positions the user as the 'specifier', for it was decided the customer would become a participant in the process by specifying the color finishing of the product. As Mr. Hamilton put it, "we wanted to do a great thing in the way we offer things to the customer." Rather than the usual exposure of the black carbon-fiber mat, the chair is custom-painted to the user's wish. "If you send me a chip that's the color of your shirt, we can do it." I was not able to attend the Milan Salone this spring, but evidently

product design



ASSESSMENT TIME: FROM LEFT, COALESSE DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL DESIGN JOHN HAMILTON; MICHAEL YOUNG AND STEELCASE AP DESIGN DIRECTOR MICHAEL HELD REVIEWING FIRST PAINTED SAMPLES AT PLANT; FABRICATION BACK TOOL

they featured two chairs, one in metallic copper auto paint and one with a gradient leg that turned a few heads (see above).

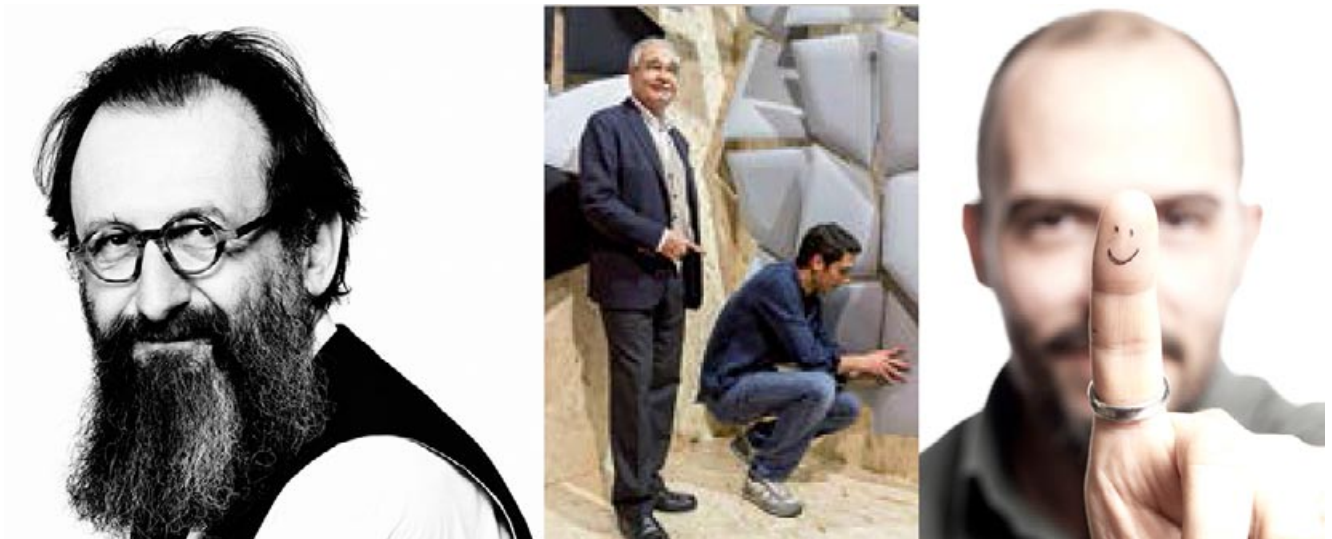
What Mr. Young has essentially done is harness some of his technologically advanced contacts in Asia to create what he refers to as “a new Industrial Art.” As we concluded our discussion, Mr. Hamilton put it, “We’re involved in

creating a ‘new world craft.’ It’s fun, it’s participatory, and I think that is the new world that we’re in; it allows users to really customize and decide why they choose this brand over that one. And it’s because you get to participate, that you feel like it’s yours.” And he chuckled, “I know that if the Eames were alive today, they’d be party to what we’re up too.”

Snowsound Acoustic Panels by Atlantic, Inc. (www.snowsoundusa.com)

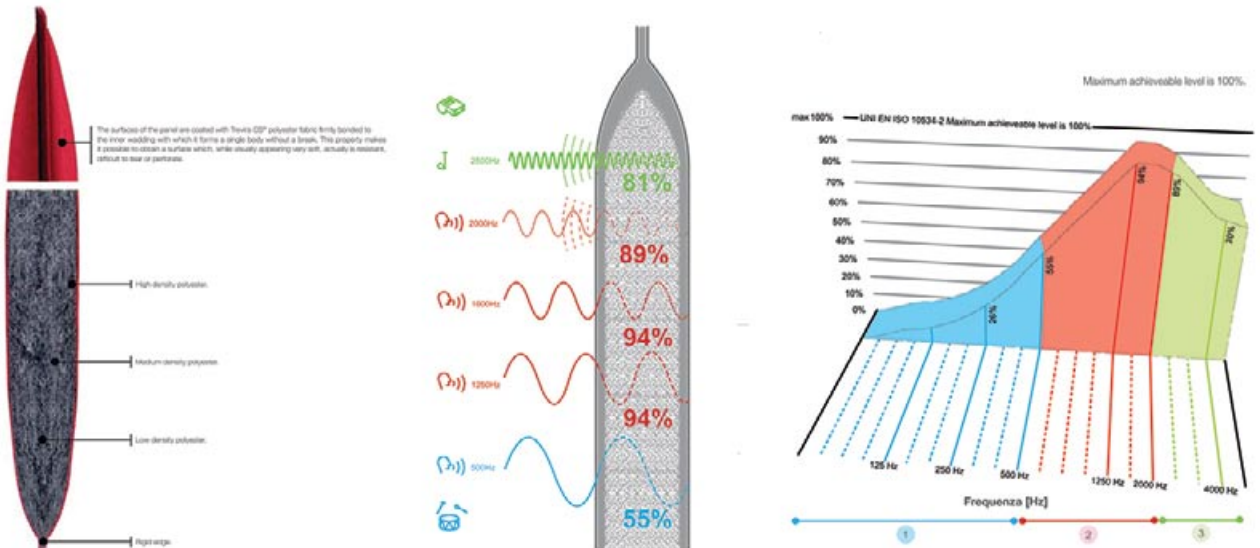
Designers: Mitesco by Michele De Lucchi; Flap by Alberto and Francesco Meda; Corista by Lorenzo Palmeri

As businesses continue to migrate into more informal settings, sanctuaries for privacy have become more necessary, and confining noise, more pressing. I liked this product because



FROM LEFT, MICHELLE DELUCCHI; ALBERTO AND FRANCESCO MEDA; LORENZO PALMERI

product design



PANEL TECHNOLOGY: FROM LEFT, SIDE PROFILE PROPERTIES; SECTION-ACOUSTICAL ATTRIBUTES; ABSORPTION DIAGRAM

it proposes bringing acoustic treatment to the 'action', irrespective of the finishes or character of the surrounding space. There are many acoustic panels and fabrics available in the marketplace; most, however, target the mid to high frequencies and perform poorly with the low frequencies (below 500 Hz.), which are difficult to dampen. These particular panels are compression molded and despite their relative thinness, they create variable-densities that provide excellent absorption in the mid to low range frequencies and reflect and absorb less of high frequencies, which are

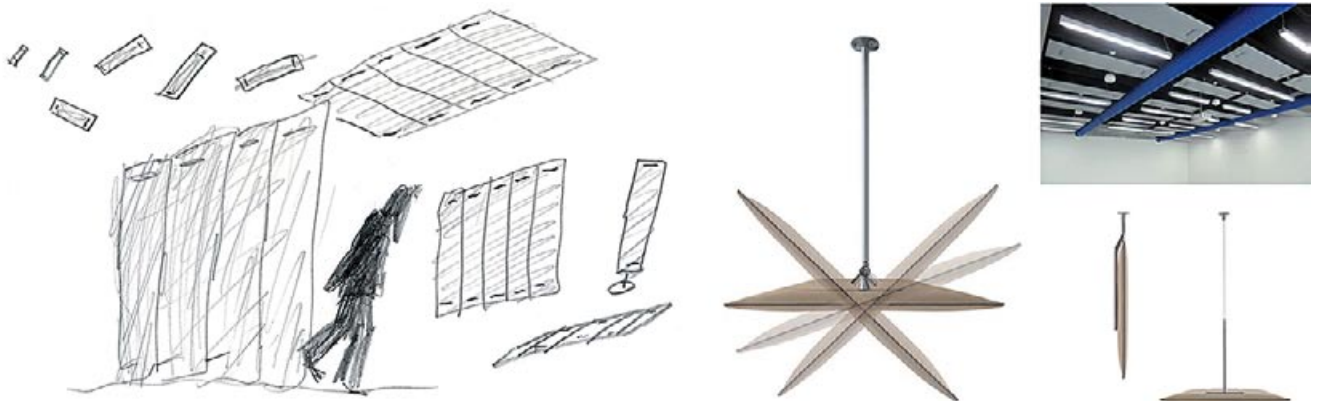
largely absorbed by walls, furnishings and the presence of people.

Snowsound derives its name and inspiration from the properties of fallen snow. The pores in snow-cover are responsible for the quiet that often accompanies snow. When acoustic waves travel above the snow, the increased pressure of the wave momentarily pushes some air into the pores, and much of the sound energy is absorbed due to friction and thermal effects. Over a short distance, this mechanism can significantly reduce the sound energy in acoustic waves. Snowsound's technology is patented

and was developed by the venerable Italian company **Caimi Brevetti SpA** in 2012. The technology has been very successful in Europe, and it will now be imported and supplied by Atlantic to dealers throughout the US.

Design-wise, Caimi Brevetti SpA worked with three legendary designers to build a palette that is simple and direct, enabling the line to address a wide range of situations.

Mitesco is a clean rectangular panel that incorporates a leg system and suspension system, which enable it to quietly define acoustic enclosures on floors, tabletops or ceilings.



MITESCO CONCEPTUAL SKETCH AND MITESCO SUSPENSIONS SYSTEMS

product design



MITESCO SITE APPLICATIONS: RESTAURANT WALL-MOUNT; LOUNGE STANDING; TABLE-TOP PANELS

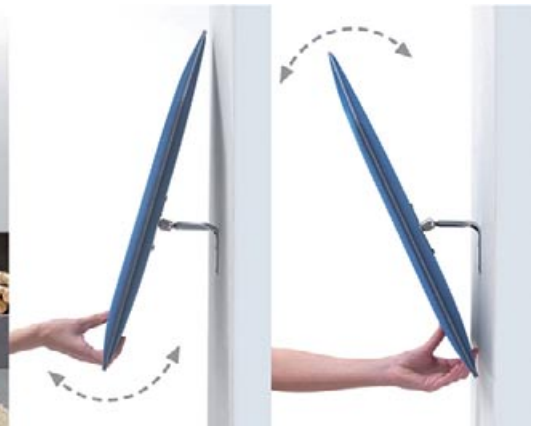
Flap, in contrast, comes in a variety of shapes and has both wall and ceiling apparatus that enable users to target and aim it in a playful manner.

Corista is a rectangular panel like Mitesco, but its genesis emerged from the concept of a lightweight, nomadic product for sound modulation in the recording/studio industry. It has a clever carrying easel that lets it 'roam' and allows users to apply it tactically

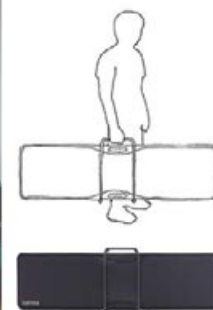
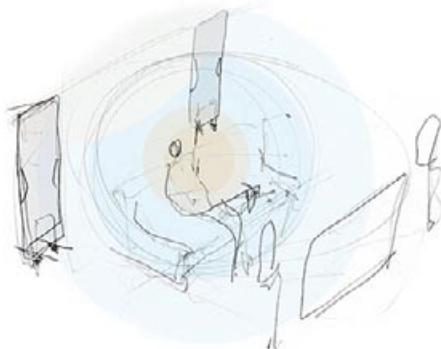
where needed – home theatres, meeting rooms and the like.

From a material standpoint, these panels are notable. As the panels are 100% compression molded polyester, the edges are inherently heat welded and very tough, eliminating the need for a frame or perimeter protection, thus making them very lightweight and portable. From a distance, the panels look like soft fabric, but upon touch, they

are tough: each is made with Trevira CS polyester fabric bonded to the inner wadding, making them very durable. From a sustainability standpoint, they are considered "single material" and are 100% recyclable, without having to separate the lining from the core. They picked up a number of awards this year including Contract's Best of Neocon Silver and 2014 CES Product Innovation Award, among others. Smart product.



FROM LEFT, FLAP CEILING APPLICATION; WALL APPLICATION; WALL-MOUNT ACTION



CORISTA CONCEPTUAL SKETCH; CORISTA'S "ROOTS" IN THE SOUND STUDIO; AS 'NOMAD'

product design



BYRON TROTTER AND SHEER

SHEER by 3M Architectural Markets (www.3marchitecturalmarkets/lighting.com)

Designer: In-house 3M team; lead designers: Byron Trotter, global design manager and Jon Kirschhoffer, senior industrial designer.

Another innovative product that caught my eye was SHEER by 3M Architectural Markets. 3M took Best of Neocon Gold with their Vessel product by Todd Bracher, though I felt this product was more interesting. Its premise was simple: a linear pendant of anodized aluminum with a clear acrylic piece below, acting as an optic for a strip LED. I was first struck by

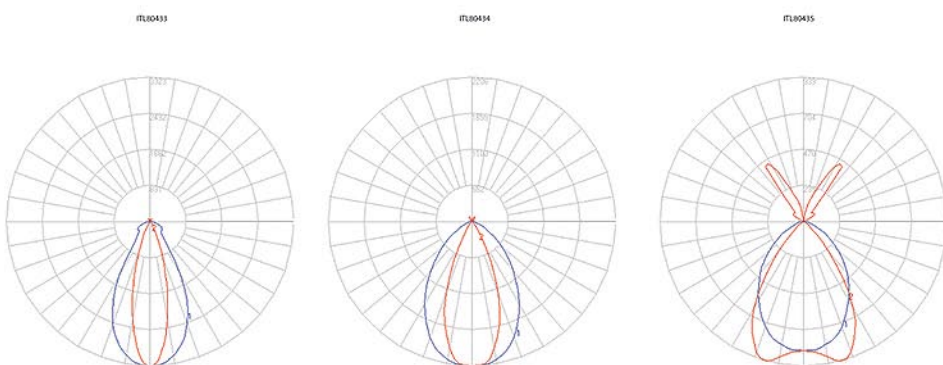
how clear the acrylic is – the fixture was almost non-existent, hovering over the desk; the detailing was minimal and restrained; and it was delivering significant light to the table surface.

Byron Trotter, who heads up 3M Global Design, shared the design team's strategy. To begin with, the acrylic used for the "lens" is optic-grade molded acrylic, manufactured to resist scratching while remaining absolutely clear. Many companies, such as the Lighting Quotient (*Fraqtir* wall-washer), are experimenting with precisely shaped optical acrylic to create lenses for controlling light distribution. 3M, however, is using the acrylic for

its clarity of light transmission and its ability to not only achieve transparency, but actually pick up the light from the surrounding space to help the fixture disappear. To control the light, they use proprietary prismatic film technology on the bottom of the lens which compliments the optical characteristics of the acrylic guide and creates three distribution options – narrow, medium and wide. On the top of the LED light-strip, they use another highly reflective film, in the mixing cavity, to further optimize and harness the available light for controlled illumination.

What's great about this fixture is that one doesn't even know if the light is on or off, yet the surface being illuminated is extremely well lit: the fixture delivers 700-800 lumens/ft. (equivalent to 60 watt bulb/ft.) in the wide and medium and 450-500 lumens/ft. in the narrow.

3M also directed effort at creating a clean expression with regard to the connectors and suspension system. The fixture, available in four or eight foot lengths, can be ganged to make unlimited runs, with an electrical drop every eight feet to keep it Class II/under 100 watts. The aluminum rail (available in clear satin, black or white anodized finish) is the actual heat sink, and when ganged, the light looks continuous; it is difficult to get a cleaner look than this. ■



DETAIL AT END OF FIXTURE, ILLUSTRATING ALTERNATE LIGHT EFFECTS DEPENDING ON STANDING RELATIONSHIP TO FIXTURE, LEFT; IES LIGHTING PLOTS OF THREE DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

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NeoCon 2014: Selected Works— Part 2

by Robert Allen

Connected by LightArt/3 Form
(www.lightart.com)

Design Team: Ryan Smith, Ahna Holder, Bruce Clark

Last year, LightArt, 3 Form's subsidiary in Seattle launched the LA2 light program with eight handmade designs that incorporate 3 Form's Varia

Ecoresin material, providing almost limitless color possibilities. This year, they launched the "systems" version of that product, Connected, enabling designers to custom design pendant light fixtures to better integrate with their individual project design parameters. I liked the program after first

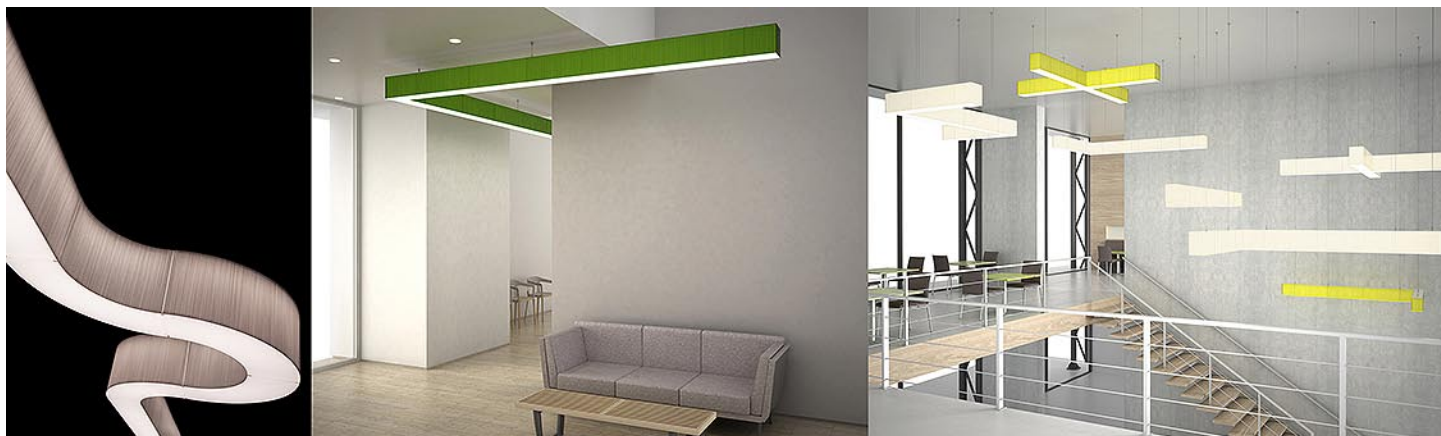
seeing it this spring at the ICFF in New York and again at NeoCon and felt it deserved attention.

Having designed many pendant fixtures over the years, I found certain aspects of this product noteworthy. First, from a methodology standpoint, the product is well thought-out. Five junction connectors, three segments and two ends were developed (see photo) that together offer up a wide possibility of layout combinations. The basic module for the linear pieces is 23", but the design team created two additional segments based on the 23" – 46" and 69" that provide an uninterrupted bottom diffuser and the ability to span the full length without additional suspension wires. In all cases, the cross-section is 6" wide by 8" tall. The three segment sizes can be ganged for any length run desired, and the standard connector, between the segmented runs, is also the element the suspension system engages. Smart.

The product is lit with solid state LED technology, using LightArt/3 Form's own proprietary circuit boards with many copper-runs (cool operation) and Nichia chips that have the highest binning quality in the industry. This assures that the LED



LightArt Team: From left, Ryan Smith, creative director, president; Ahna Holder, product director; Bruce Clark, product manager



Various applications illustrating scope of product system

product design



Zeroquindici.015: bench; bench with back; trash can



color rendering is extremely accurate; light-emitting diodes (LEDs) are notoriously inconsistent in color rendition, so accuracy in “binning” them into consistent groupings is all-important. This means that when fixtures are “ganged”, they all match in color and look continuous in expression. Proper heat-sinking also has a lot to do with the “lifespan” of LEDs, and LightArt’s design turns the aluminum top cap-plate into a heat sink, with a white powder-coat reflective underbelly to enhance the interior ambiance of the fixture. Additionally, they designed the cap-plate to only occupy 4” out of the 6” available, which leaves an inch on each side to provide some ceiling illumination.

What I liked most about the product beyond it’s smart detail and flexibility for re-configuration and expression, is that once it’s specified and configured in Seattle, it flat-packs for shipping and its light-weight architecture is easily assembled and erected by ordinary electricians in the field. Light art—yes.

Zeroquindici.015 by Diemmebi
(www.diemmebi.com)

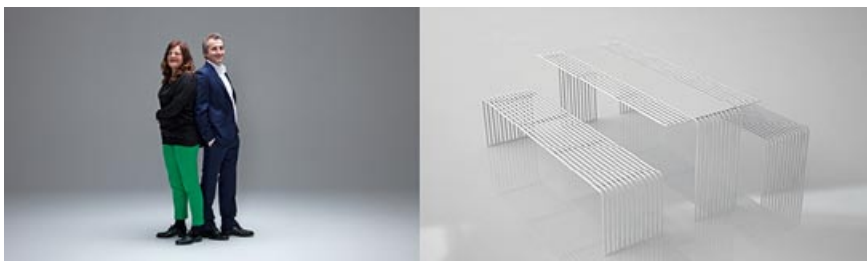
Design Team: Alberto Basaglia and Natalia Rota Nodari

Years ago, I featured laFilo chairs in a show article, and this year, the maker, Diemmebi, won Gold in the Best of NeoCon with their stacking laKendo chair; what I found interesting, however, was its US launch of the Zeroquindici.015 family of fur-

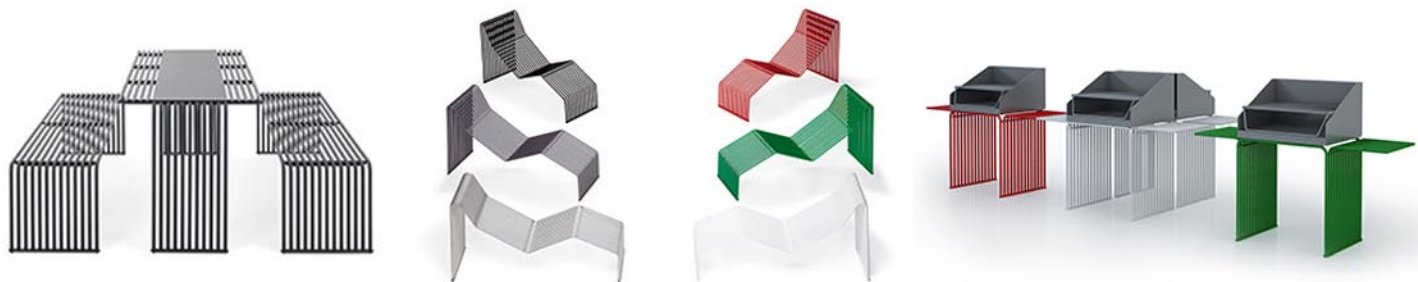
niture, in what they refer to as their Community|Home|Urbantime program. It is conceived as ‘outdoor’ furniture, but as we have seen since the early 2000s, the line between social public space and what we consider outdoor/indoor continues to blur.

What I enjoyed about the product is that it follows along through multiple design reiterations using the same design vocabulary throughout. Every item in the program is based on the use of a simple circular stainless steel or hot-dip steel, epoxy-powder coated 18 mm tube, available in a range of color variations. The tubes are bent and coupled in different ways to take on multiple forms, allowing for countless layouts and components, and the entire collection is 100% recycled and recyclable.

The Zeroquindici.015 line includes benches, both straight and bent, some with backs, others not; reclined chaise; free-standing and pole-mounted trash cans; picnic tables; and, oh yes, a barbecue. I tried the serpentine bench they brought to the show, and it was surprisingly comfortable.



Alberto Basaglia + Natalia Rota Nodari; Zeroquindici.015 bench



Zeroquindici.015: picnic table; chaise; barbecue

product design

Designed by Alberto Basaglia and Natalia Rota Nodari, this team got their start back in 1999 when they created the YDF brand and collection, winning first prize in the contest Young & Design. They also design for Lema, Rexite, BPA, Luxit, I TRE, Pedrali, Casa Blitz and Progetti, among others.

They are well represented and quite at home at Diemmebi, as the image above indicates. Besides Zero-quindici.015, they designed the laFilo

seating collection, which I featured in last year's article; a playful coat-rack Cornetto that's in the same design vocabulary as a stacking folding table called Ribaltino; and its larger counterpart Ribaltone, which has a removable top that stacks; a smart clean table system called Passepartout; and Upgrade, a fun playful outdoor seat. This is Italian design at its best.

Two other products caught my eye on floors 7 and 8 that I felt were noteworthy and worth covering...

Molo benchwall+thinwall by Molo (www.molodesign.com)

Design Team: Stephanie Forsythe + Todd MacAllen

Molo, which continues to (refreshingly) come to market with product that builds on its original concept of expandable self-supporting walls, launched a new lightweight wall and wall-bench system that works in conjunction with their larger wall systems and components, such as the fanning bench. Based in Vancouver, Canada, and founded by two architects who met in school, the design and production studio continues its exploration of space-making in combination with experiments in manufacturing, materials and structure.

This year, Molo developed a product, appropriately called thinwall, that works similarly to their larger wall programs such as softblock. It's a flexible space partition, measuring only 3.5" (8.75cm) in thickness, and can be used in acoustic applications as well as serve as a sculptural interior space liner that can be illuminated from within for solid walls, columns and ceilings. It also functions as a



Designers amidst their product: Cornetto, Ribaltino, Ribaltone, Passepartout, Upgrade



Stephanie Forsythe + Todd MacAllen (Photo credit: Martin Tessler) left; Barry Gnypp, right

product design

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free standing partition wall for meeting rooms, phone call nooks and storage areas, shaping more intimate areas within any larger space.

benchwall is an expandable, flexible bench with a 6' (1.8 meter) tall back that doubles as an acoustic space partition as well as seating. Flexible in length, benchwall can be stretched up to 40 times its compressed size (4.75" /12cm), extending to become a 12'(3.5m) long, high-backed bench, or swept into a circular bench-lined room for intimate meetings with effective acoustic absorption properties.

Together, benchwall and thinwall can be joined with the fanning bench to form a modular system, with all

elements connecting to one another by magnetic end panels. Each of these elements are made from 100% craft paper or 100% non-woven textile honeycomb structures and available in white (textile), natural brown (craft paper), bamboo charcoal black (paper) and soon-to-be-released indigo blue (paper). All of the product can be matched to molo's highly acclaimed softwall + softblock, cloud softlight and softseating, creating endless possibilities for flexible spatial configurations.

I start off the discussion by saying 'refreshingly' because so many companies either launch with a great idea but slowly migrate away from their original premise as they grow and mature (Blu-

Dot and their pre-cut metal bend-to-make product comes to mind), or feel they have to continually come out with new ideas and forms to keep up with the fashion-driven seasonal merry-go-round that characterizes avant garde movements and efforts. Molo comes back every year – to the ICFF, NeoCon, Salone, etc. – and one must stop in because there is always some incremental advance or new twist on some product of theirs that continues to take the idea they started with and build upon it. Whether it's a new way to light the wall, a new fireproof or acoustically-enhanced material, they all share the same DNA.

This approach is certainly the tougher road to travel, but rewarding, as the product line continues to broaden and grow richer in depth. It certainly is a tremendous accomplishment given all the distractions and stimuli we encounter as designers who must continually stand before an expectant public.

Agora Conference and Collaboration

by Rouillard (www.rouillard.ca)

Designer: Alain Roy & Team

Floors 7 and 8 are so condensed that it's easy to walk right past a company whose work is deserving of a larger venue. Such was the case with Rouillard, a Quebec-based company



thinwall, left; benchwall, right



Agora Conference, ganged with integral modesty panel



Agora Conference, end profile

product design

that featured their new product Agora Conference and Collaboration. The quiet language of the table and its consistent detail nicely provides for the clean execution of alternate configurations and assemblies, and at a reasonable price-point.

I had the pleasure of chatting with president Alain Roy, who has owned the company since 2008, as well as his helpful daughter, Ann Marie, and they shared insight into the details of the product.

The tables are built around an aluminum/powder-coated kit-of-parts that feature two primary legs, one that is rectilinear that they refer to as the “large Mono” leg and the “small Mono” leg that is “L” shaped. These are used throughout the line and can be organized in different ways for different effects.

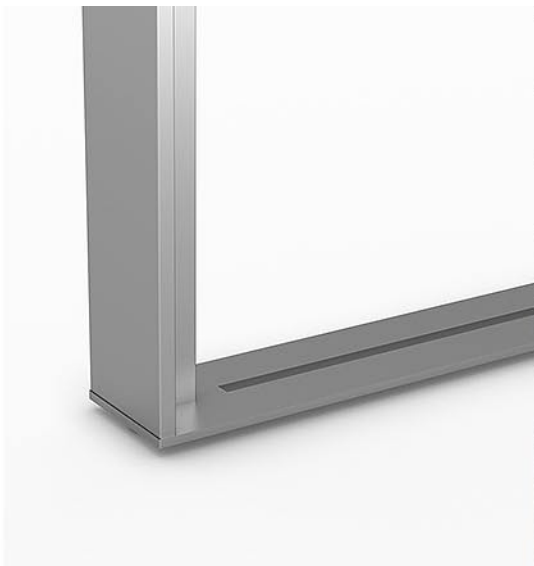
One of the table options has an aluminum chassis around the perimeter, which provides for leg attachment and perimeter strength, also allowing for an

expressed thin 5/8” wood top that uses 50% less wood than a conventional wood top because of the structural effect of the frame.

For situations where open access is important, either two of the “small Mono” legs are combined with a steel base plate at the bottom (referred to as the “T leg”) or two “large Mono” legs are set to either end of a steel base plate, forming what they refer to as the “O leg”, offering a clean square-edged wood profile at the perimeter.



Large Mono leg, left; perimeter-frame configuration, right

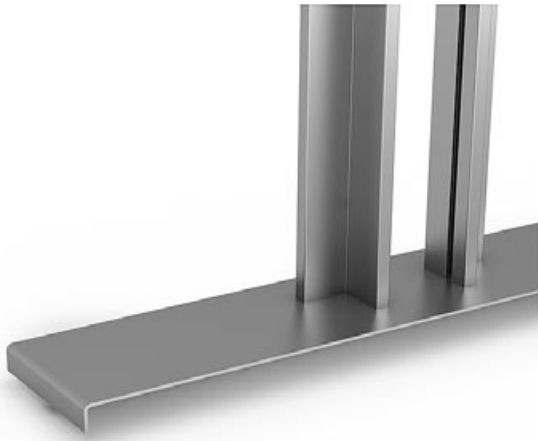


“O” leg, utilizing large Mono leg with baseplate

Wire chase and concealment, including the levelers, are likewise well thought-out and handled in a clean, minimal manner, which is surprisingly rare in the world of table legs. Because of the intelligence of the system in general, the product can also be further organized into media and smaller informal configurations, all utilizing the same kit-of-parts. There's something to be said for quiet.

Ed. Note: This is the second installation in a three-part series. Robert Allen periodically joins our journal to provide a designer's perspective. His education and experience as a Harvard-trained architect, interior design professor and accomplished furniture

designer whose own product designs have distinguished themselves in the marketplace, provide a keen eye and perspective that is highly informative. His focus is intended to feature products of particular interest to him, rather than a more general survey. Accordingly, he often reviews products that fall outside the larger, well-publicized product launches and we think his observations expand our understanding of both the products he reviews and of the processes and considerations of product design in general. For part one, see officeinsight 7.7.14, NeoCon 2014: Selected Works – Part 1, <http://www.officeinsight.com/2112>.



"T" leg, utilizing small Mono leg with baseplate



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NeoCon 2014: Selected Works – Part 3

by Robert Allen

Freedman Chair (www.freedman-chair.com)

Designer: Simon Freedman

Every year, there are one or two novelty products or companies that show up at NeoCon that create a stir and don't fall neatly into anyone's package. This year, directly outside the press room, one stand was always bustling with visitors, so I put off stopping in — until the last hour of the last day — and I'm glad I did as I had the designer to myself. The chair looked the part, which I have to say as a designer, does the chair a disservice. It clearly was an orthopedic product,

but with more intelligence than the over-wrought- design suggested. The premise of the chair was straightforward, acknowledging that man was not meant to sit, but rather to stand — certainly one of the primary bases for all of the adjustable worktable tops that filled the Mart this year. Unfortunately for most of us, sitting is pretty much the reality we have to reconcile to. This chair was designed to allow the spine to assume its standing posture while sitting, which is why in some instances it is referred to as a stool. But a chair it is, and it is meant to be sat in for extended periods of time.

While Mr. Freedman is not the first to provide a chair that orients the spine in an upright posture, he does want to be the first to factor in the body's asymmetrical disposition by providing full-axial rotation movement; and a seat architecture that fits all (he points out that the distance between the Ischial Tuberosities is in fact very similar for all of us, so seat beds needn't vary to the degree they often do); and lastly, a chair that doesn't rely on our knee/shin for weight support like the iconic 1979 Variable Balans by Peter Opsvik, but rather our buttocks/pelvic area.



PORTRAIT



SIMON FREEDMAN SHARES CHAIRS PROPERTIES

product design

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Unlike many of the other chairs that address ergonomic posture by supporting the spine with cushions or membranes, he wants the chair to force the body into its natural standing position by orienting the pelvis into the correct 27 degree forward tilt so that the muscles surrounding the spine, which keep us upright, are the same ones used to sit. Consequently, what looks like a back support lumbar element on the chair is, in fact, only providing occasional local pressure stimulation to help the muscles relax. He acknowledges that there are also many bio-mechanical chairs that re-orient the pelvis accordingly, but his utilizes a patented seat shape/polyurethane material to “grip” the user and keep them from slipping forward. He also incorporates a patented pivot action to accommodate both continual movement and the orientation our pelvis assumes naturally, due to the

uneven leg length and asymmetrical bodies most of us have inherently. While he talked, I tested the chair for 20 minutes or so, and I can say it was both comfortable and stable, and yes, my legs are uneven, and yes, I survived major back surgery – the result of sitting too much? Who knows.

Putting aside the science of the chair, I enjoyed Mr. Freedman’s unbridled passion. An osteopath by training, this British inventor and entrepreneur bristled with enthusiasm and was definitely a man on a mission. He claims to have the distinction of being KickStarter UK’s most successful fundraising effort in its history (and 24th most successful KickStarter design project in the world) raising \$500,000 in 30 days. He has given over his life for the last 18 years pursuing the topic, mortgaged his house three times, designed and built all four prototypes (he notes that he’s

become an expert at silicone molding), organized the Kickstarter and all marketing efforts, and even built the booth in two days using a clever system of clothespins to hold the panels together in mounting this overseas NeoCon introduction himself.

While some might feel the styling of the chair could use a serious vacation from the form-follows-function aircraft-engineer perspective, or as one associate put it, “Whoa, that’s a bit much...”, I’m sure there are others who feel it’s right on mark in its funkiness factor. One thing is certain: the design does optimize material from a sustainable consideration. The aluminum usage is very efficient (13.5 kilos/30lbs versus average chair weight 23-25 kilos/50lbs.), and the carbon footprint is negligible (technically negative). The operation of the chair, for height adjustment, is handled in a low tech, direct manner, similar to a stool or the Eames Group chair, i.e. a simple screw device. He points out how rarely we actually adjust a chair once the correct height is established.

Think what you may of this product, I loved this guy’s spirit. He believes in this product and sincerely feels it will make a huge impact on the many disorders that afflict those of us that have to sit all day. If nothing else, his three-year record speaks for itself. He recites that in August 2010, he was sitting before 100 kilos of clay in his garden and kitchen wondering what he was doing. By 2011, his first Mark I chair was featured at the World Invention Show, where it was awarded the International Invention of the Year. His Mark II was on the Judges’ shortlist at the D&AD Product Design of the Year Awards 2012, and his Mark III made its debut at the 100% Design Show in London, 2013 and has 26 patents in the works. This guy hit the ground running and has never looked back.



BOOTH THAT MR. FREEDMAN DESIGNED AND ERECTED – NOTE CLOTHES-PIN FASTENING SYSTEM

Nessel by Geiger (www.geiger.com)

Designer: Vincent Van Duysen

Each year there are a number of 'festive' pieces that vie for everyone's attention at the Mart, Bernhardt's spindled-rocker, the *Harper* chair, and Geiger's *Crosshatch* chair to name a few in this year's showing. Then there are the chairs that aren't as loud in demeanor, standing quietly as attractive additions to the year's collection and don't get as much attention. I chose several: one from Geiger and a number from Bernhardt that fit that ticket and that I feel are deserving of attention.



NESSEL, DETAIL



NEOCON 2014, CONFERENCE SETTING WITH NESSEL, CLOSED ARM. PHOTO CREDIT: ALLEN

Geiger's *Nessel Chair* by Belgian Vincent Van Duysen was designed to work in spaces that situate between the contract and residential market. Geiger commissioned the chair in the spirit of last year's release, *Brabo*, but without the leather detailing and larger formal qualities – something that could find itself in smaller settings such as dining situations or as guest chairs.

What I liked about the piece was its presence on the floor. It is beautifully proportioned and available in closed or open sides and two-tone fabric options which are all standard. The detail on the chair is striking. Jay Chapman, Geiger's product development manager, pointed out some of the intricacies of the chair's design, knowing how much I appreciate such stuff. The wood leg, for example, where the fabric meets the wood, is slightly recessed so the fabric and wood end up co-planar around the entire chair. (Pix 4) Another really smart detail was a recess that the CNC

machine creates to enable the fabric to hold tight tolerances and remain flat. Many manufacturers would have a welt cord evident, but that isn't necessary with this provision. The cushions were also noticeably taut and tailored, largely achieved by the consistency and intelligence of their cushions, which are over-molded plywood/foam construction, ensuring each cushion is exactly identical. As with *Brabo*, the legs are solid ash or walnut and shaped by a 5-axis CNC machine and mortise/tenon connected, as are all Geiger's chairs.



VINCENT VAN DUYSEN. PHOTO CREDIT: MARK SEGAL



NESSEL, CLOSED ARM, ASH



NESSEL, OPEN, ASH



product design



CLAUDIO + HARRY WASHINGTON, LEFT; MITT, IN ACTION, RIGHT

Mr. Van Duysen has his own architects' studio in Antwerp and divides his time between architecture, interiors and his furniture design interests. He's designed for companies such as WOW, Poliform, Modular and VIC-CARBE and was designated "Designer of the Year 2009" at the Maison & Objet fair in Paris.

A handsome chair by any measure.

Mitt by Bernhardt Design (www.bernhardtdesign.com)

Design Team: Claudio + Harry Washington

I was first introduced to the work of these two El Salvador designers at the ICFF in 2009, and subsequently, while researching their work, I ran across the description of the large sofa piece *Calibra* that I'd seen at the show, in the corporate literature. Mr. Washington

described the piece as rather like dealing with a "pig pirouetting gracefully on small legs." When I saw the new chair Mitt this year in the showroom, I reflected back on that description with a smile.

Mitt is a plump, smartly-tailored comfortable piece and likewise with definite character, described in this year's corporate literature as "reminiscent of a baseball glove...and true to form, stitching and tailoring." While featuring their occasional table program, *Curio*, in 2010 for Bernhardt, I met Mr. Washington, who at the time was five years out of school and actively engaged in building a design practice in El Salvador. Evidently much has changed since then. The press release states, "2013 was a year of change. In March, they launched a new business; in June,

they welcomed a second child; and in July, they bought a house." "Suddenly, everything had changed and our existing furniture didn't work very well anymore," said Mr. Washington. "We needed chairs that could be easily moved around, were open and were comfortable with no hard edges."

This couple may have designed Mitt to meet a very personal need, but its character is well suited to the living room milieu of today's business environs. A tailored leather or fabric handle allows users to quickly and playfully move the chair to suit their needs in a space, and weight-locking casters, coupled with a relatively lightweight structure, provide an unusually easy seat to relocate and migrate in. It can also be ordered in two-tone configurations, which adds to its good-natured disposition. Fun and well-thrown.



MITT IN BUSINESS LOUNGE, LEFT; MITT INTEGRAL HANDLE AND STITCHING DETAIL, RIGHT

product design



CHARLES POLLOCK, CP 1 AND CP 2 BENCH AND OTTOMAN COLLECTION

CP 1 and CP 2 Bench and Ottoman Collection by Bernhardt Design (www.bernhardtdesign.com)

Designer: Charles Pollock

I close with this handsome bench and ottoman addition to the CP Collection Bernhardt began introducing in 2012 by the renowned designer Charles Pollock. Mr. Pollock died unexpectedly in August 2013 while working in his studio in Queens, but his influence will continue to leave a lasting impression on this industry. Probably best remembered for his classic executive desk chair (the Pollock Chair, which was introduced by Knoll in 1965, the year of his mentor Florence Knoll's retirement), Pollock made huge advances in the conceptual and production side of seating. He felt that any product must be visually attractive, functional and affordable, and his designs were always distinguished by being technically advanced, yet easy to manufacture at a reasonable price.

Mr. Pollock's first job was designing products and interiors for Donald Deskey, the acclaimed designer of Radio City Music Hall. He then worked for George Nelson, who had admired his work while at Pratt. It is here that he perfected the art of swaging, a technique he had started developing as a student. In 1958, the *Swag Leg Collection* for Herman Miller by George Nelson was introduced, consisting of approximately 10 pieces. Florence Knoll took note of Pollock's designs and began a relationship with him, which produced his first product for Knoll, the *657 Sling Chair*. After that release in 1960, Florence Knoll made an investment in the young designer, giving him 20 dollars a month for rent and a small development allowance to continue working on new products. Pollock spent the next five years developing a new concept and production method for office seating, culminating in the release of the *Pollock Chair* in 1965. The chair

was notable for his patented invention of rim technology and the simplicity of its assembly. When it was released, the chair was an instant success and became a visual symbol of the modern workplace. The Pollock Chair went on to become one of the best-selling office chairs in history and spawned numerous copies over the years. My first desk chair was an old, well-worn Pollock Chair—and it still does service.

With the exception of the *Penelope Chair*, introduced in 1982 for Castelli, Mr. Pollock lived in relative anonymity on New York's Upper West Side until 2012 when Bernhardt's Jerry Helling, through contact with Pollock's long-time friend and classmate Lucia de Respinis, made contact with the designer. What came out of that association was first the *CP 1 and 2 Lounge Collection* in 2012, then the *CP Table Collection* in 2013 and this year, the *CP Bench and Ottoman Collection* completing out the set.



DETAILS

product design

Here again, we have a product whose intricate detail and innovation move out beyond the ordinary and appeal to the intangible sense we all feel for things well-made and conceived. Whether it be stitching or formal shaping, the detail clarifies the intentions of the piece, and what is quietly communicated on an every-day basis is an attitude of caring.

I suggest that this sense of detail and connectedness occurs from a direct correlation between his eye and his manner of working, that when coupled with a business culture that appreciates and allows for the idiosyncrasies of the designers' meanderings, results in the kind of explorations that lead to products such as this.

In a New York Times interview in May 2012, Pollock admits he relies on computers for much of the implementation of his work, and goes on to say, "...but I am so practiced in drawing that I can

draw it full size and you can take the measurements off my drawings. It's like drafting, but it's a work of art, a really beautiful drawing. So I gave him (Mr. Helling of Bernhardt) the drawings, and he came back with prototypes. It was exactly what he wanted."

Recognition and appreciation go out to Mr. Helling and Ms. de Respinis for extending to Mr. Pollock the opportunity to share with the design community what conclusions, insights, age and experience have cultivated and provided. It's a rare position for any company to take these days and refreshing at the least. And for Mr. Pollock, what more can one ask for from life than a good conclusion.

Ed. Note: This is the third installation in a three-part series. Robert Allen periodically joins our journal to provide a designer's perspective. His education and experience as a

Harvard-trained architect, interior design professor and accomplished furniture designer whose own product designs have distinguished themselves in the marketplace, provides a keen eye and perspective that is highly informative. His focus is intended to feature products of particular interest to him, rather than a more general survey. Accordingly, he often reviews products that fall outside the larger, well-publicized product launches, and we think his observations expand our understanding of both the products he reviews and of the processes and considerations of product design in general. For parts one and two, see officeinsight 7.7.14, NeoCon 2014: Selected Works – Part 1, <http://www.officeinsight.com/2112> and officeinsight 7.14.14, NeoCon2014: Selected Works – Part 2, <http://www.officeinsight.com/2116>. ■

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