



WHITE PAPER SERIES

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A Front Row Seat to Chair Design

DESIGN FUNDAMENTALS: FF&E SPECIFICATIONS



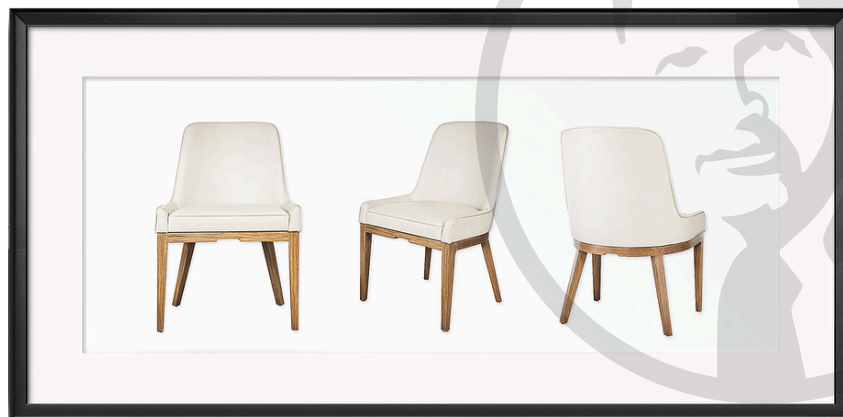
A Front Row Seat to Chair Design

While we encounter chairs routinely in our daily lives, we seldom consider the service they tirelessly provide. Taken for granted is the precision required to integrate arms, seat, back and legs in perfect harmony. Millenniums have seen the evolution of this object, one whose function is to seat us. While development in material and technology are key to changes in chair design, we must credit a particular love and creative inspiration for the continuous fascination with its form and function.

A chair takes its place in the realm of art, with global exhibits and collections displayed in the finest museums. This plays to its remarkable journey from simple stone seats of 10,000 BC to the beauty of ergonomic and sculptural modern day design. The chair is truly distinguished as it defines the history of furniture.

In a statement from the Museum of Modern Art in NYC, form and function interact very closely in chair design. "In chairs more than in in any other object human beings are the unit of measure," Curator Paola Antonelli explains, "and designers are forced to walk a fine line between standardization and personalization.". There are many factors that must be considered in the design of a chair. The designer must think about who will be using it, and where. In some cases, such as a seat on a airplane, chairs are designed for a general user. In other instances the chair might be designed for a specific user. Each chair has its own set of criteria or constraints that govern the process of its design.

"For designers, chairs are a ritual of initiation."



HISTORY

Anthropologist discovered that prior to the advent of the chair, people squatted in various positions as related to their cultures.

As noted by the Design Institute of San Diego, archeologists found evidence of stone objects of domestication during the Neolithic period dating back to 3200 BC. Seating in the form of benches, beds and tables were early efforts to elevate ourselves above the ground. It was not until the 16th century that the chairs became common. Until then, people sat on chests, benches, and stools, which were the ordinary seats of everyday life. The number of chairs surviving from an earlier date is exceedingly limited.

A basic timeline of the chair, provided by "The Furniture Bible: Everything You Need to Know to Identify, Restore and Care for Furniture" (Artisan Books, Nov 2014), author Christophe Pourny, a French-born, New York-based furniture expert, opens with the history of the world as seen through chairs from the 5th Century through today. His historic perspective demonstrates human creativity, ingenuity and adaptability to the development of the chair as it relates to the social and cultural mores of the period as follows:



PRE - 12TH CENTURY

Seats were primarily three-legged stools or benches. They were primitive, crudely made, and purely functional.

12TH - 15TH CENTURY

Seats added backs and four legs to become chairs. Gothic styles influenced furniture, which was often carved. High-backed and very straight cathedral chairs were typical.





16TH - 17TH CENTURY

As the Renaissance thrived, chairs became more refined, lighter, more comfortable and more decorative. Looks became as important as function. The church was no longer the only patron of the arts; noblemen were, too. But European Kings, particularly the French line of Lois XIII, XIV, XV, wielded the greatest influence. Louis XIV introduced luxurious ornamentation, veneers, rich fabrics, exotic wood, stones, gold and silver.

18TH CENTURY

This period took that richness and formality even further. Monarchs ushered in Rococo forms, curved lines, floral decorations and even more ornamentation. Instead of owning just one kind of chair, the middle and upper classes now had several kinds of seating: stools for perching, dining chairs, side chairs, armchairs, and a low bench by the fire.



19TH CENTURY

After the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire emerged. Heavy, straight neoclassical lines replaced Rococo frippery. Large, Empire chairs became very popular. Around mid-century, the Victorian era took hold, with its opulent displays of wealth. This period became known for its heavy fabrics, like velvet, in dark colours, such as red and green. The counterpart to this style in America was the Federal movement, a colonial classic look.

20TH CENTURY

No longer associated with sovereigns, furniture design came into the hands of the people. The century started with mission, arts and crafts styles. Chairs' severe lines were a reaction to Victorian excesses and reflected industrialism. Art nouveau, modernism, art deco and Bauhaus followed. After World War II, mid-century modernism took off. Its function first, forthright, minimalist look fit the nation's mood. Chairs were light and sleek and featured new, inventive materials: molded plywood, plastic and chrome.

