

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

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FALL 1951

WALKER ART CENTER • MINNEAPOLIS

on page one

wire ice-cream-parlor chair
kitchen chair
Thonet bentwood chair

In the winter issue:

USEFUL GIFTS 1951

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY
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CONTENTS FOR FALL 1951

this issue of

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

is devoted to

CONTEMPORARY CHAIRS

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the exhibition are
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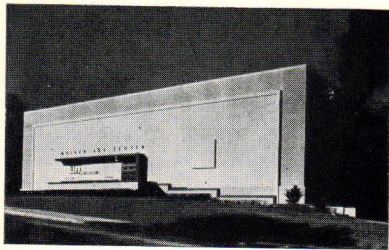
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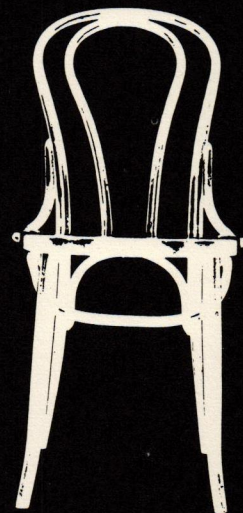
contemporary chairs

The exhibition, *Contemporary Chairs and Their Prototypes*, held at the Walker Art Center, reaffirmed our conviction that many people accept the contemporary idiom. There was tremendous interest in the sixty-seven chairs shown, and almost without exception visitors left the gallery with a strong interest in one or more chairs. There seemed to be one general reservation—the costs were too high. We agree. However, it should be pointed out that traditional furniture is also costly. (For a good explanation of the problems involved in the manufacture and distribution of furniture, read George Nelson's article in the February, 1947, issue of *Fortune*.)

Much of the competently and rationally designed furniture available today is in the upper price range. Designers and critics alike have been defenders of the thought involved in the production of contemporary chairs, but the results of their articulate theorizing are not so easily available, or so inexpensive, as either the theory might indicate or the consumer might wish. One of the basic aims of the designers, whom we watched with so much hope in the 1930's and 40's, was the lowering of cost through mass production. Too often the materials that were adopted to lower the cost of production are now used for their style value, and ironically enough, addressed to the luxury market.

The Windsor chair, the early Thonet bentwood chair, and the twisted wire ice-cream-parlor chair were all produced in great quantity. Design finesse characterized these chairs, but their success was not only due to their styling. They sold by the millions because they were durable and provided good seating, and because they were priced so that people could buy them. The furniture consumer does not derive sufficient benefit from the technological ingenuity of the 20th century, but he has had his taste whetted and is becoming more discriminating. He now looks forward to design and production successes in low-cost furniture.

In this issue we have attempted to explore and appraise contemporary chairs from the consumer's point of view. Descriptive captions are on page 16.





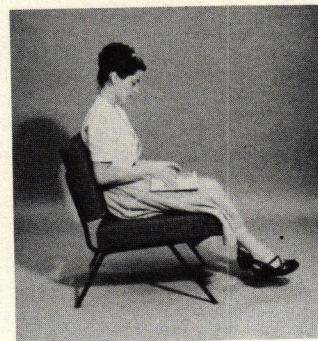
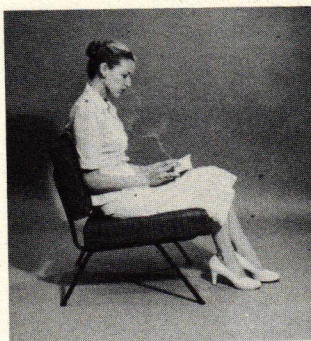
contour delineator developed by students at the Layton School of Art; Rudolf Jegart, instructor.

Below, left to right

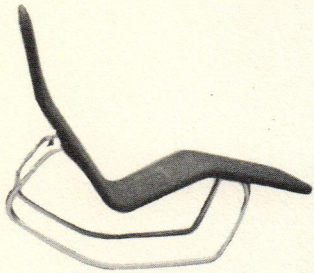
A woman 5'7" —her weight is properly distributed on buttocks and thighs, her back supported. Comfortable for casual use.

A woman 5'4" —her trunk is properly supported when she sits back in the chair, but her feet dangle in mid-air straining the muscles in the thigh, and causing sufficient pressure to restrict circulation.

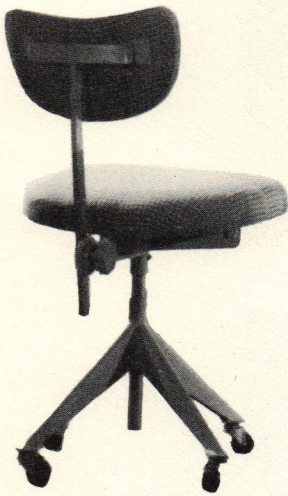
The woman 5'4", to put her feet on the floor, must slide down in the too deep chair leaving her back unsupported, her spine curved.



comfort size and proportion, angle of seat to back



1



2



3

For years people have struggled with the problem of making a truly comfortable chair. In this day of quantity production there is a continuous attempt to produce a chair that is comfortable for everyone—a virtual impossibility. Perhaps like clothing, the ideal chair would be custom built. Legend has it that Brigham Young's wives went to the dressmaker to be measured for clothing, and to the chairmaker to be measured for chairs. Neither custom clothing nor custom chairs should be necessary for most people—but in selecting chairs it should be remembered that one of the important considerations in seating comfort is the size and proportion of the chair in relation to the anatomy of the sitter. The best chair is uncomfortable if it be too small or too large. The average woman is 5'4" tall. Very few lounge chairs are made in which this average woman can be comfortable—nearly all chairs are too high and too deep for her.

Some research has been done to determine the prerequisites of seating comfort, but only a minority of available chairs show the influence of research. The Norwegian, Dr. Akerblom, spent a great deal of time on posture studies, and the design which was developed as a result of his research was almost identical with one type of Windsor chair! One of the difficulties with laboratory experiments such as his, or with those carried on at the Layton School of Art, is that it is almost impossible to explore at one time all of the factors that are involved in seating comfort. In addition to size and proportion, comfort is dependent on the length of time the sitter uses his chair, the activity he is engaged in while sitting, the angle of the seating plane in relation to the back support, the shaping and resiliency of the back and seat, and the position, direction, and size of the arm rests in relation to all parts of the chair.

An obvious solution to some of these problems would seem to be an adjustable chair. The Morris chair did allow change in the angle at which the back was used, but in spite of all the mechanical wit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries very little else has been done to develop a really satisfactory adjustable chair for everyday use in homes. A dining chair of low cost that could be adjusted to the varied and changing sizes of a family would certainly be a desirable addition to the chairs that are now available.