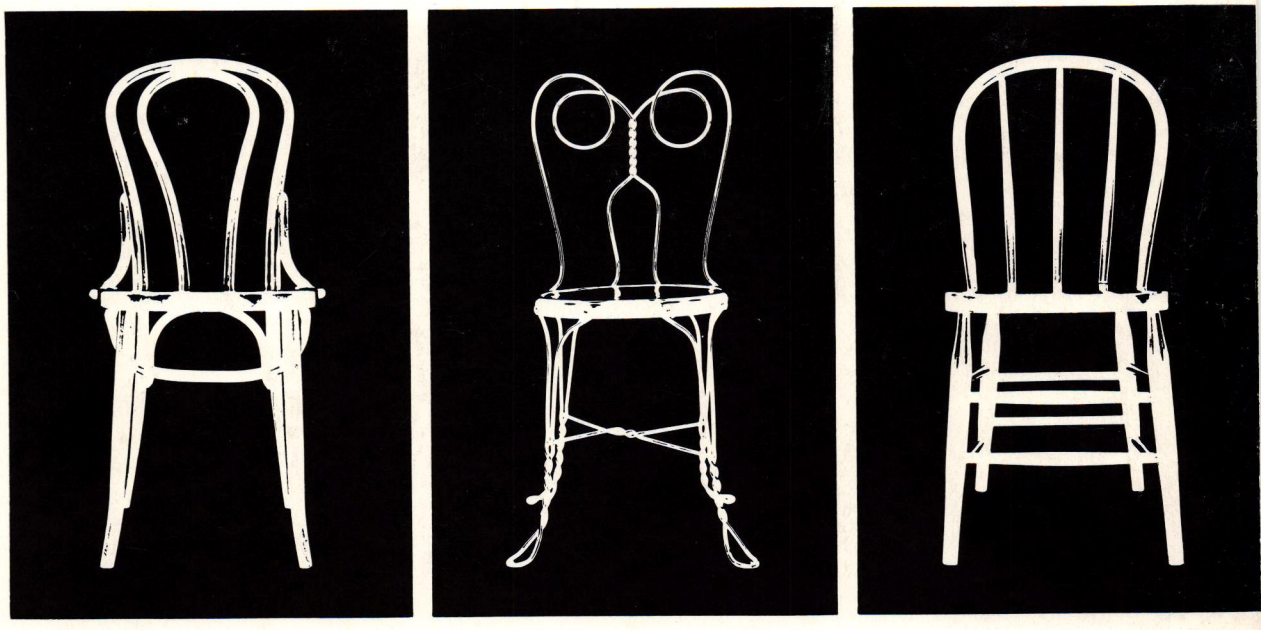

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

No. 20 / 25c
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

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

CONTENTS FOR FALL 1951

this issue of

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

is devoted to

CONTEMPORARY CHAIRS

addresses of lenders to the exhibition are listed on the back cover

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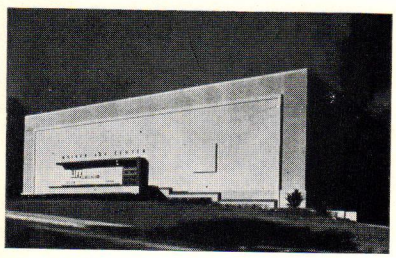


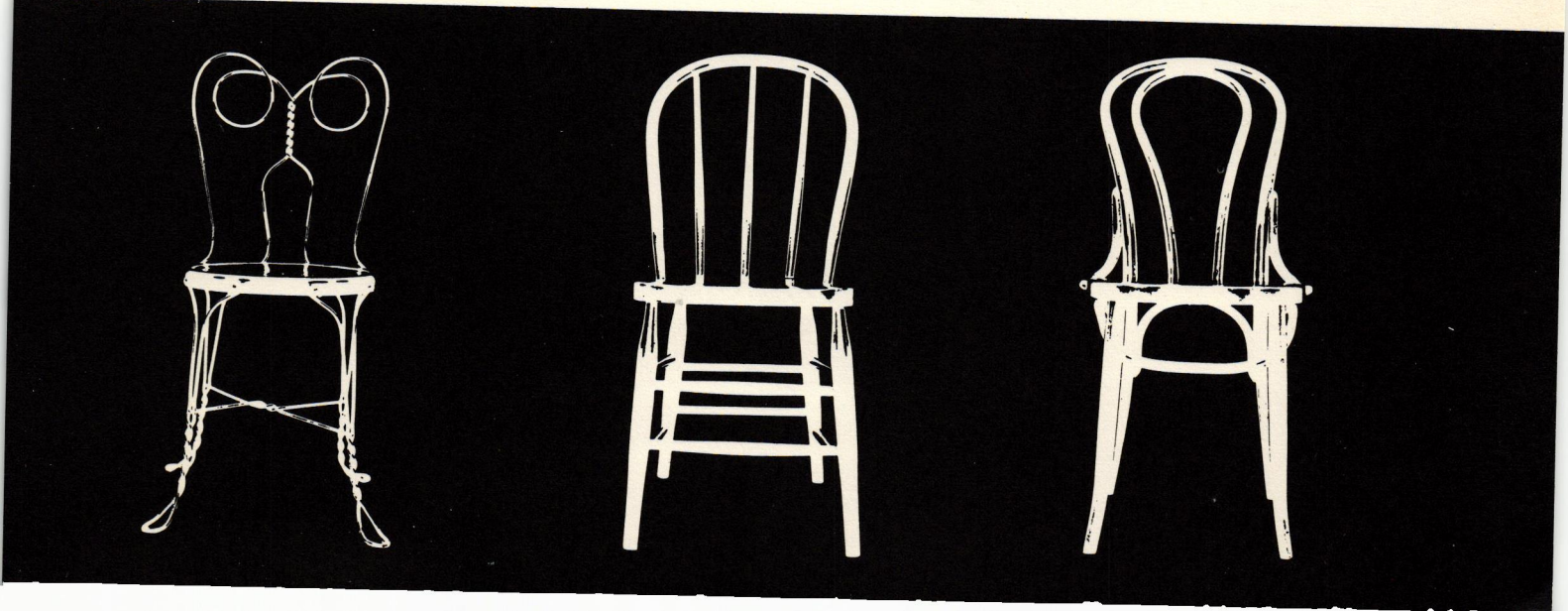
contemporary chairs

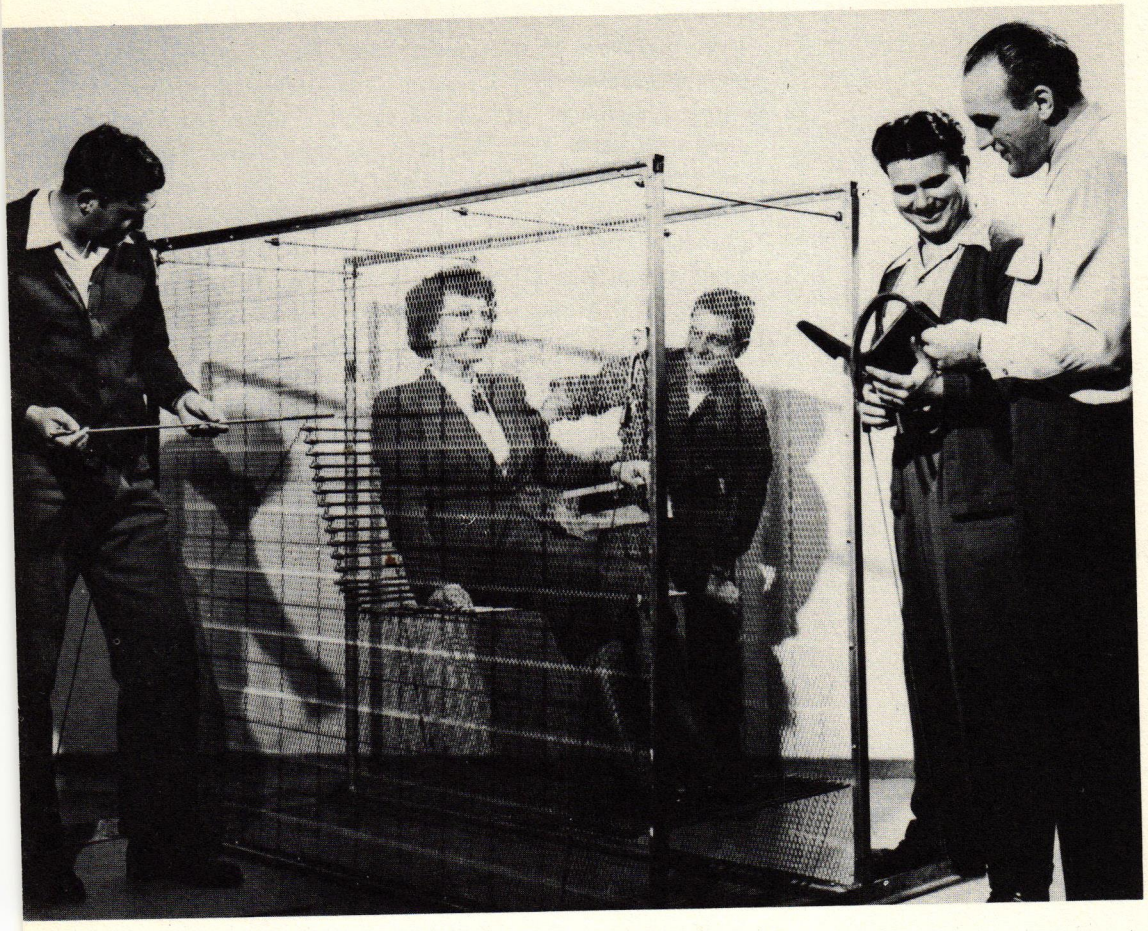
The exhibition, *Contemporary Chairs and Their Prototypes,* held at the Walker Art Center, reaffirmed our conviction that many people accept the contemporary idiom. There was tremendous interest in the sixty-seven chairs shown, and almost without exception visitors left the gallery with a strong interest 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.





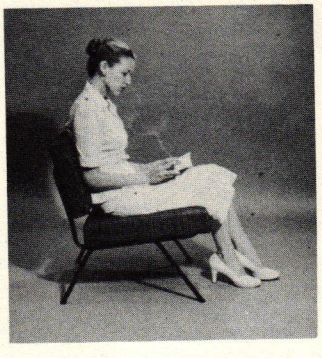
contour delineator developed by students at the Layton School of Art; Rudolf Jegart, instructor.

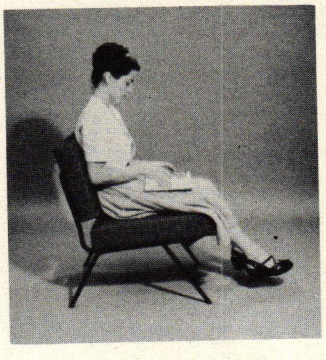
Below, left to right

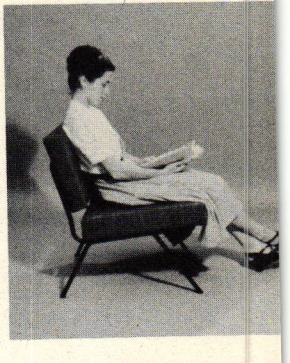
A woman 5'7"—her weight is properly distributed on buttocks and thighs, her back supported. Comfortable for casual use.

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.

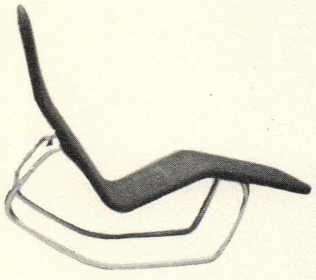
The woman 5'4", to put her feet on the floor, must slide down in the too deep chair leaving her back unsupported, her spine curved.







comfort size and proportion, angle of seat to back



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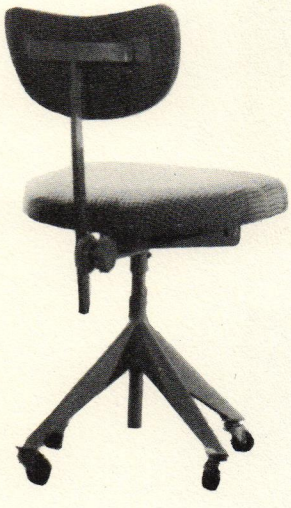

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3

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.

comfort

4

5

shaped wood, molded fiberglas she

6

7

foam rubber, suspended fabric

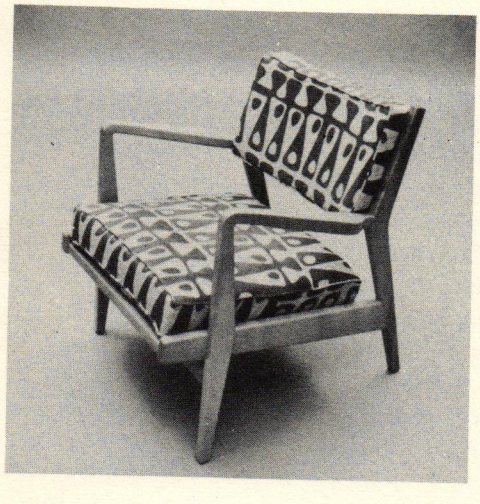
cantilevered chassis

8

flexible metal

9

foam rubber cushions



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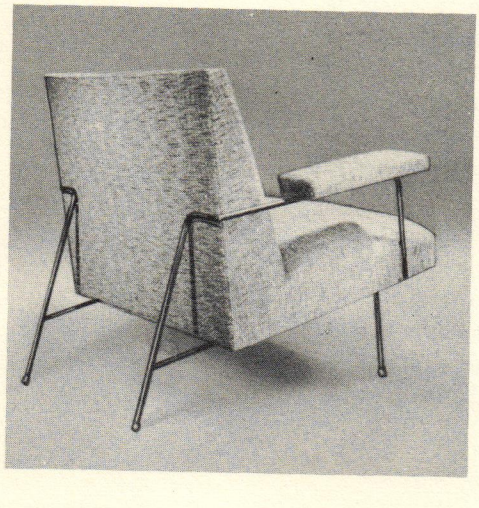
spring construction



11

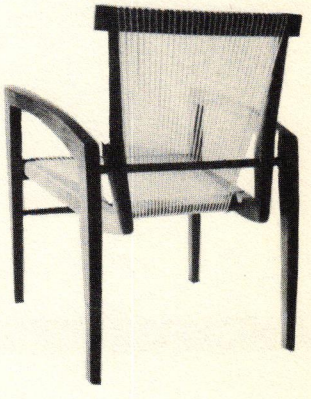
appearance

Furniture designers, like all of us, are influenced by their general cultural milieu. The form of the contemporary chair is not entirely determined by functional requirements or industrial techniques and the properties of materials. The taste of the designer, his feeling for shapes, scale, space, and movement are important determinants of his final designs. It is unnecessary to point out direct derivations, but in a general way it is easy to see the influence of painters and sculptors—artists who deal primarily in visually expressive language—on the design of everyday objects. Mondrian paintings have inspired the appearance of both storage units and chairs. The free forms and biomorphic shapes used by Arp, Miro, and Calder have influenced the work of several furniture designers. (For a good discussion of this read *Modern Art In Your Life* by Robert Goldwater and Rene d'Harnoncourt, Museum of Modern Art.) The use of these shapes in furniture has served neither to conserve materials nor to simplify production problems, and only in rare cases have they made the furniture more functional. The incorporation of painterly shapes in furniture can be expressive, but if the shapes are irrational to furniture function and production, the designs become superficial and contribute nothing to the solution of furniture problems. However, when designers in different areas use a vocabulary of shapes and volumes that are compatible with each other, the result is the emergence of forms that can be used to create a harmonious environment—an achievement worthy of effort.

13

The change in visual expression which has become so marked in the past decade is now reflected in furniture, and has resulted in furniture forms that seem incompatible with the old architecture most consumers continue to use through economic necessity. Those who feel a natural sympathy for contemporary forms, but still live in Victorian dwellings or the atrocities of the 20's, have a difficult problem to solve. Thin structure, transparency, and floating shapes—which are a neat complement to contemporary architecture—present a challenging design problem when one tries to reconcile them with heavy door casings, mop-boards, moldings, small windows, and the kind of closure and mass effects found in older buildings. However, it is possible through color, simplification of backgrounds, and various grouping devices to use well designed contemporary furniture in houses of any period. One does not buy paintings or books, or choose friends, because they are of the same vintage as the house in which one lives. Furniture, like friends, should be selected with a strong personal bias—making as few compromises as possible.

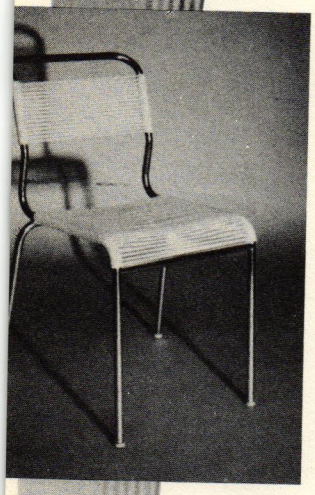
It is not accidental that some of the best modern furniture is architect-designed. When designers failed to attain the feeling for space that architects were trying to express, the architects turned furniture-designer in order to complete and unify their work. The massive furniture that had been designed for use within the walls of the old architecture needed radical changes to make it less obstructive to the free-flow of space.



16

The new architecture requires furniture less bulky, lighter in scale, and visually more three-dimensional to articulate unbroken spaces. Some of the furniture forms have become so three-dimensionally dynamic that the pieces cannot be used in small homes, but on the whole they are light in appearance, linear, and open—making them adaptable to many types of setting and a pleasure to see in an uncluttered space.

transparent, light in scale, visually three dimensional



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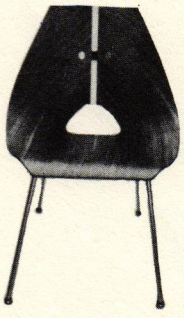

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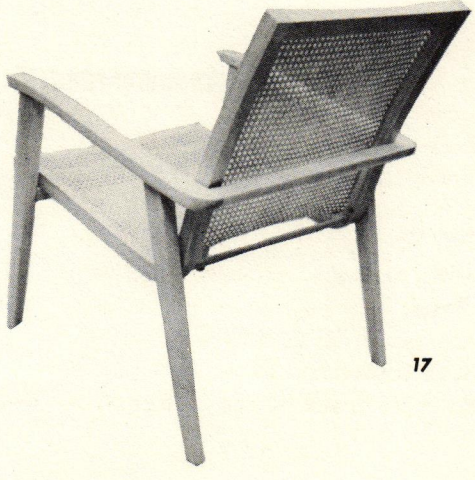

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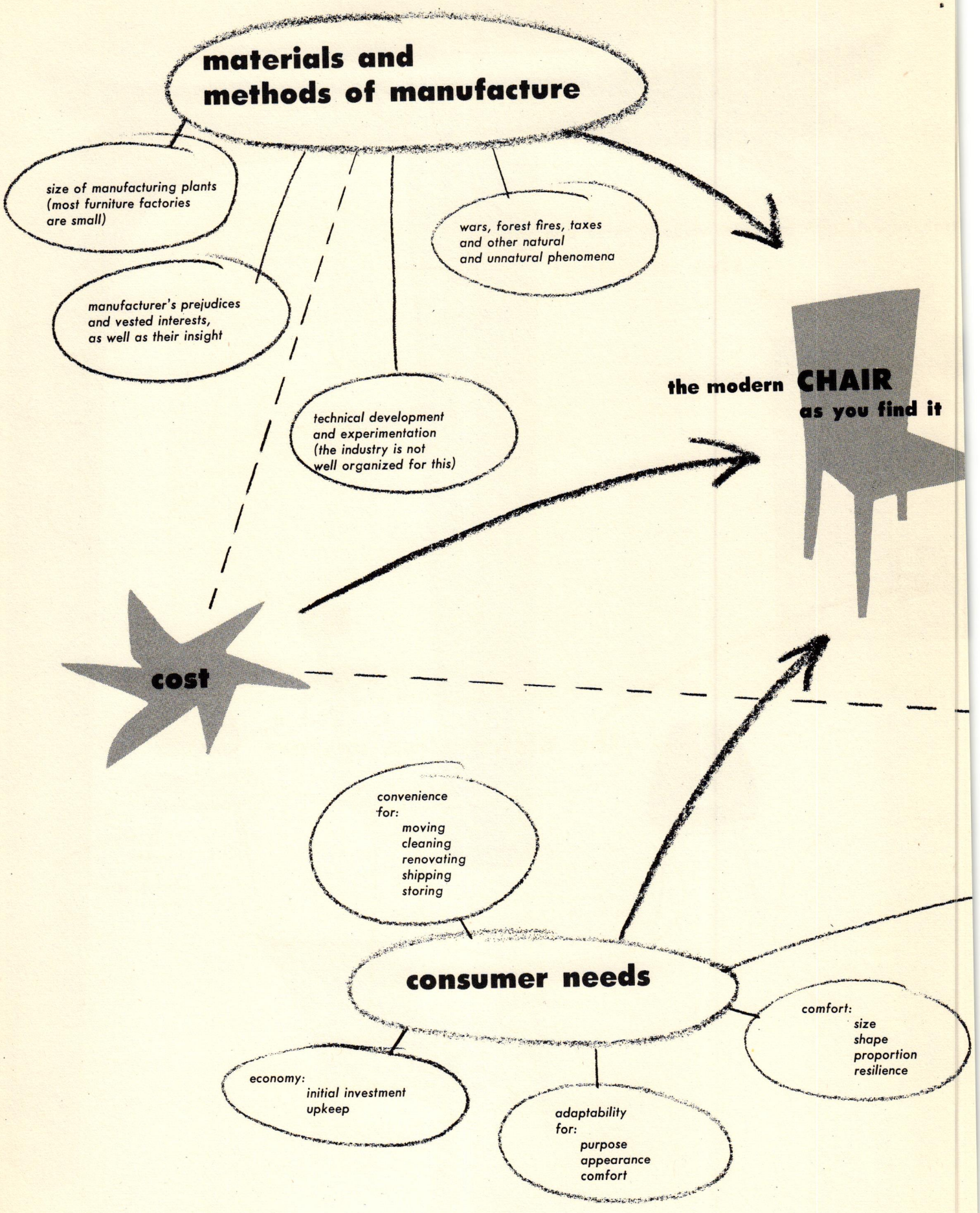
materials and
methods of manufacture
size of manufacturing plants
(most furniture factories
are small)
wars, forest fires, taxes
and other natural
and unnatural phenomena
manufacturer's prejudices
and vested interests,
as well as their insight
technical development
and experimentation
(the industry is not
well organized for this)
the modern CHAIR
as you find it
cost
convenience
for:
moving
cleaning
renovating
shipping
storing
consumer needs
comfort:
size
shape
proportion
resilience
economy:
initial investment
upkeep
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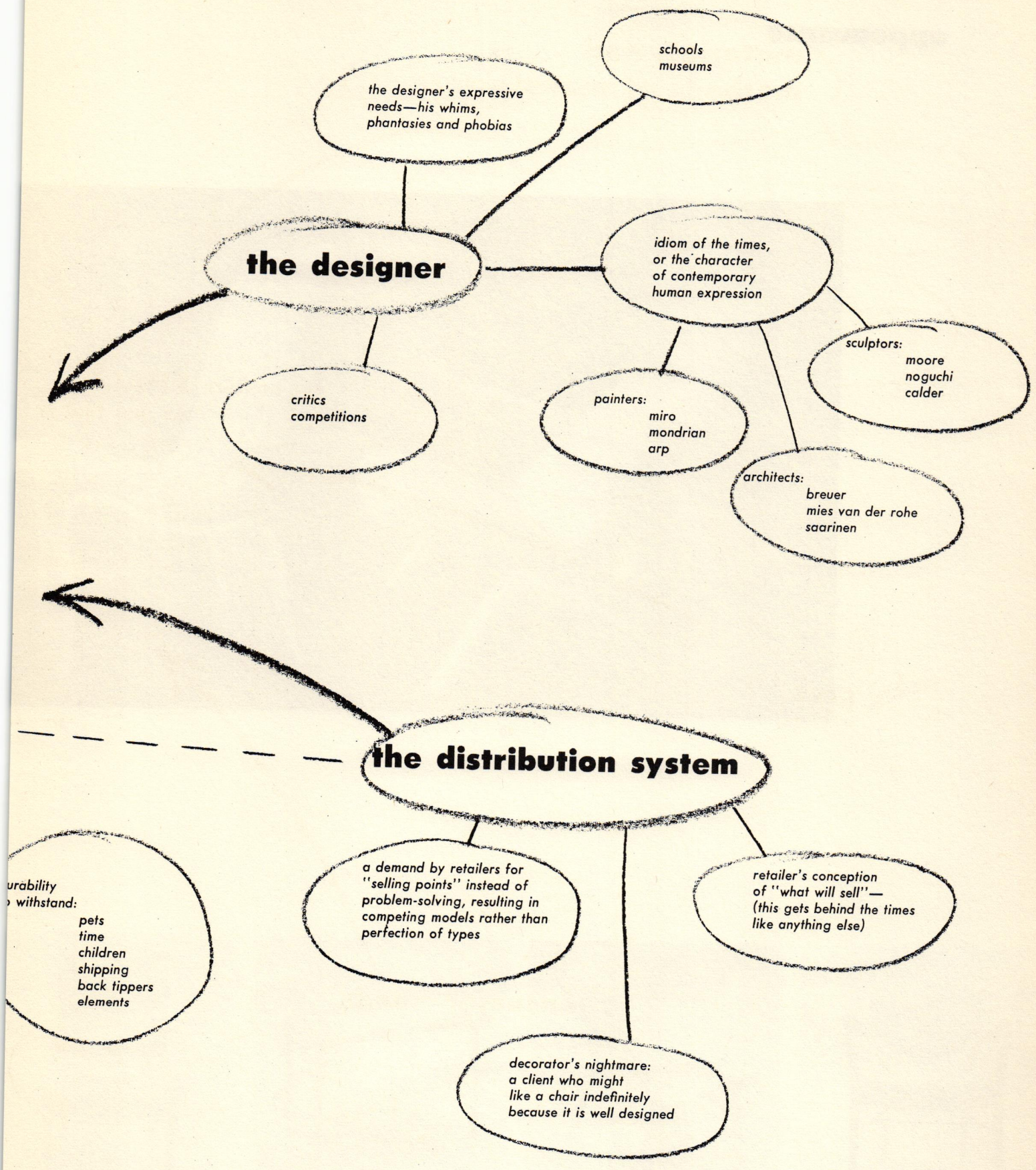
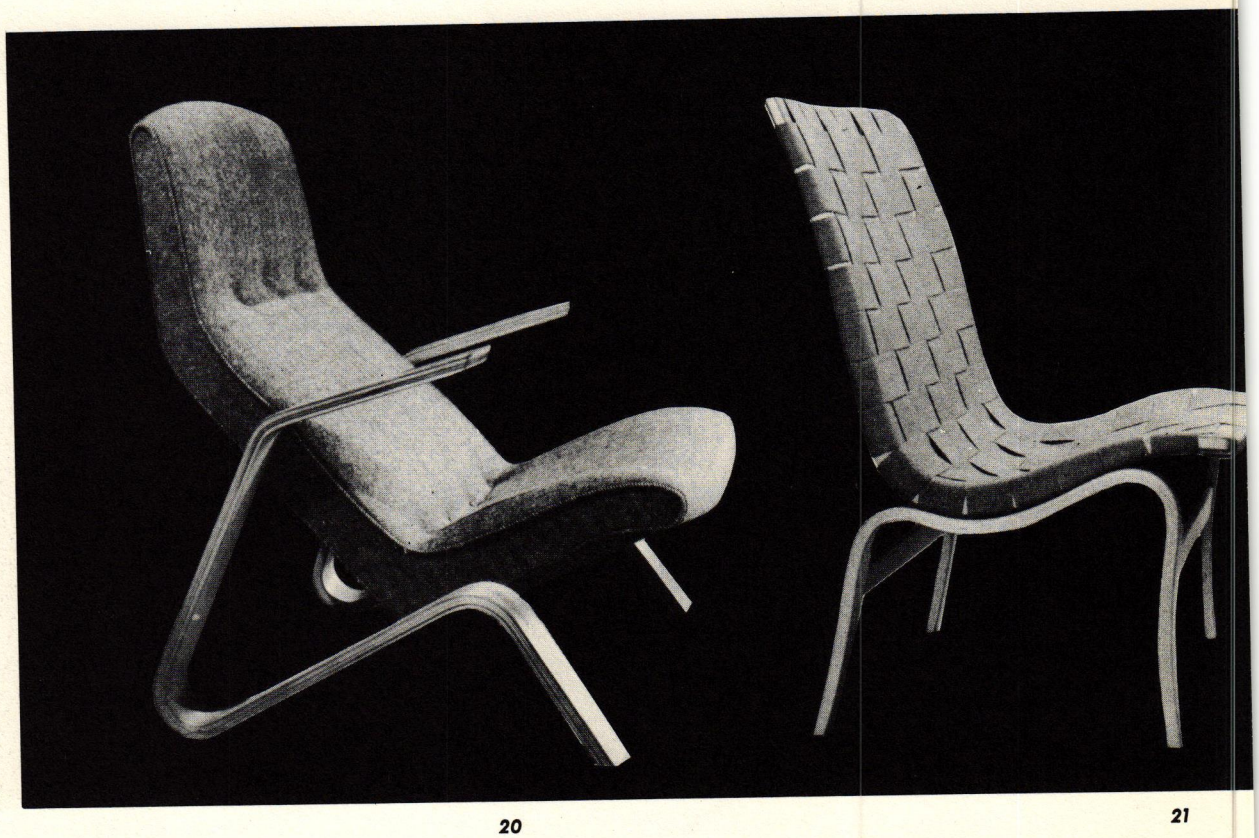
for:
purpose
appearance
comfort


schools
museums
the designer's expressive needs—his whims, phantasies and phobias
the designer
idiom of the times, or the character of contemporary human expression
sculptors:
moore
noguchi
calder
critics
competitions
painters:
miro
mondrian
arp
architects:
breuer
mies van der rohe
saarinen
the distribution system
urability
withstand:
pets
time
children
shipping
back tippers
elements
a demand by retailers for "selling points" instead of problem-solving, resulting in competing models rather than perfection of types
retailer's conception of "what will sell"— (this gets behind the times like anything else)
decorator's nightmare: a client who might like a chair indefinitely because it is well designed

appearance



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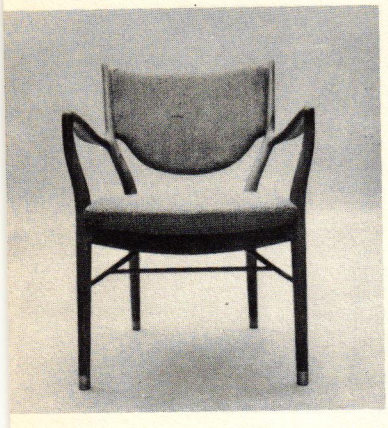

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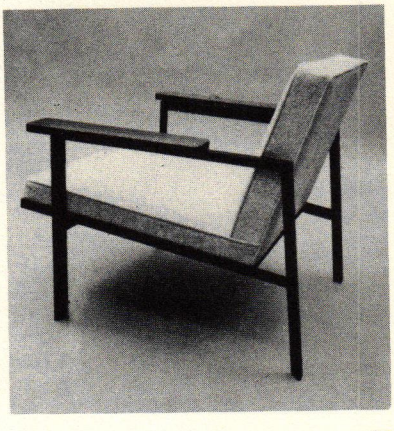

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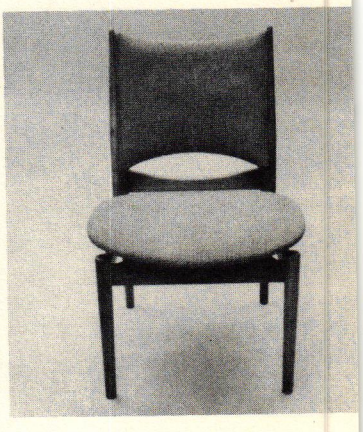

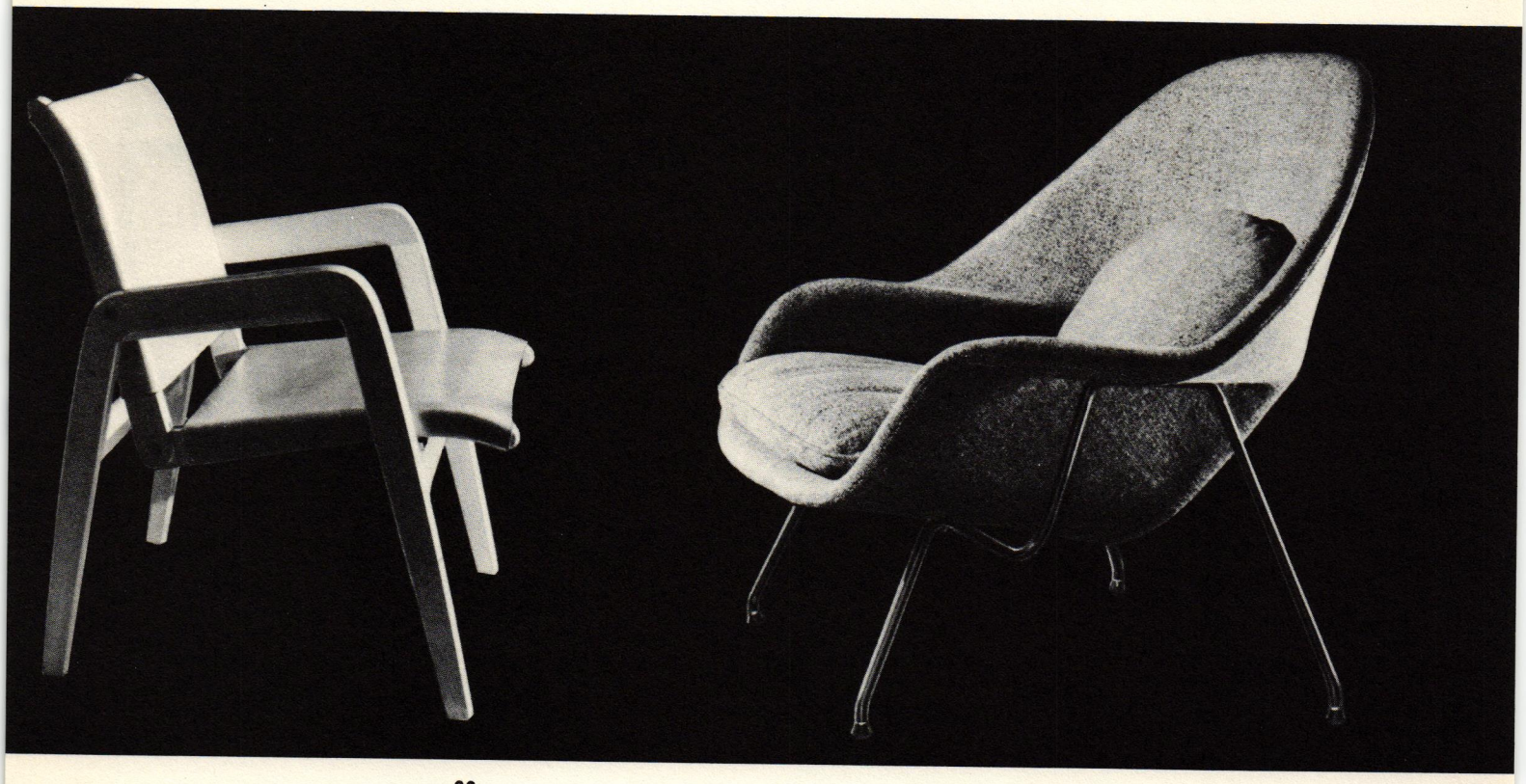

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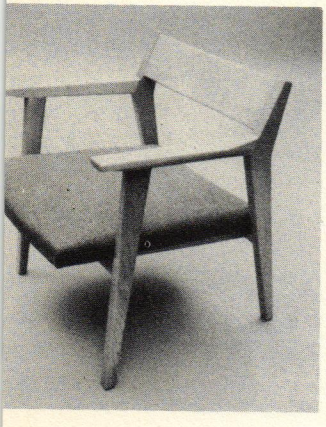
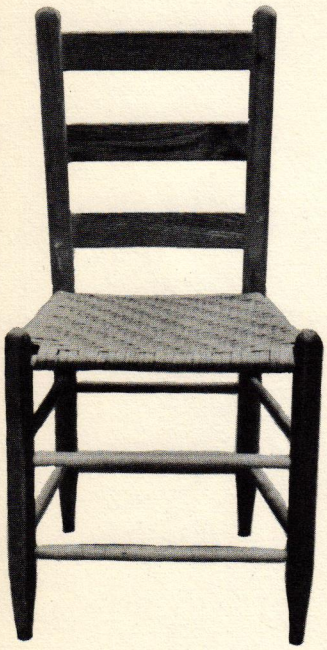


28

dramatic shapes for emphasis and space articulation

economy



29

30

31

32

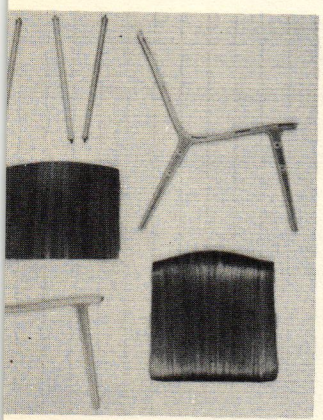
prefabricated chairs

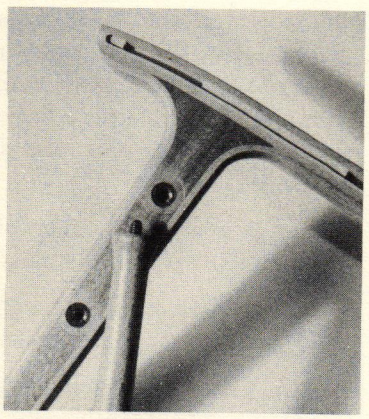
34

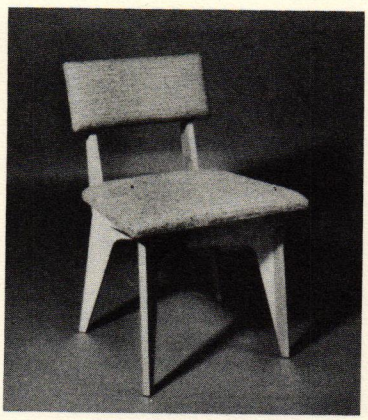
33

The side chair (figure 29)—available for a little over three dollars—is adaptable for use in a contemporary interior. Figure 30 has a removable, washable cover over a sponge rubber base, and sells for under thirty dollars. Figure 31 is of traditional construction—mass produced, and sells for about nine dollars, unfinished. The Italian chair, figure 32, retails for approximately twenty dollars. Figure 33, a relatively inexpensive upholstered chair, sells for about eighty dollars.

There are several knock-down chairs available. We have pictured here two that are unusually well engineered. Figure 34 is a highly developed type of construction. Steel rods run through the delicate looking rungs. The tennis-racket-like laminations make it very strong and graceful. It retails for approximately sixty dollars. Figure 35 is unusually sturdy. Made of birch plywood, it may be ordered without upholstery directly from the manufacturers for under twenty dollars.







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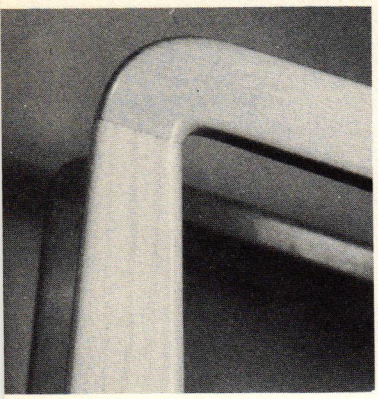

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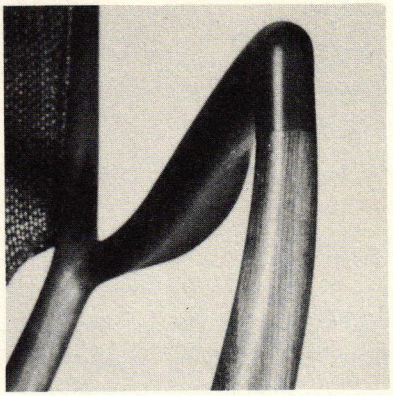

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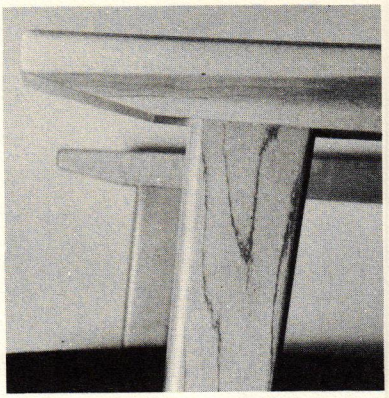

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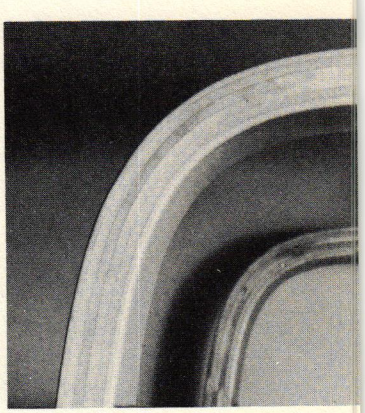


construction

The development of chair designs that require fewer parts, and therefore fewer joints, is one of the more widely accepted means of simplifying chair production. The structural properties of plywood, laminated bentwood, and metal, have made more practicable the production of chair forms that have strength without bulk, and grace without fragility. As the appearance of these forms becomes more generally accepted, there is an unfortunate tendency for some designers and manufacturers to adopt the superficial visual qualities of the forms without respect to structure.

Figures 1 and 2 reveal a tendency to force the type of construction used in order to achieve visual lightness. (In shaping solid wood to create joints, as in figures 1 and 2, the less strong, short grain of the wood is necessarily used in a load-bearing capacity.)

Figure 3 is a traditional, but direct and strong joint. Figure 4 shows laminated bentwood requiring no joining. (In both figures 3 and 4, the strong, long grain of the wood is used in a load-bearing capacity.)

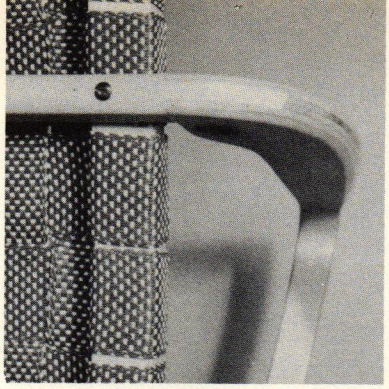
Figure 5 is a wood screw combined with a machine screw and a conical nut. All of the strain and weight is borne at one point. Visual lightness results from this joint, but it is not as strong as the joint in figure 6, where the strain is partially absorbed by members that tie back to front, and side to side, and are locked together with a screw.

Figure 7 is a bridal joint which ties arm to frame and back support. It is very strong, but light in appearance.

Figure 8 is solid wood. A saddle joint bears part of the load and makes a very durable structure.

Figure 9 is a construction using screws and laminated bentwood which is practically indestructible.

Figure 10—In this construction electronic welding with rubber mountings achieves flexibility with strength.



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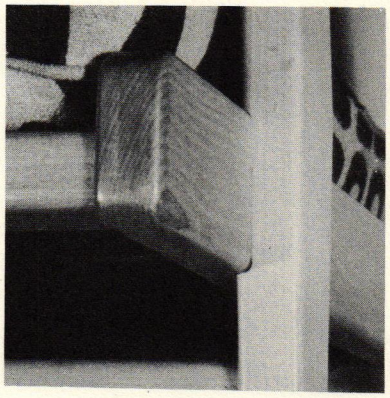

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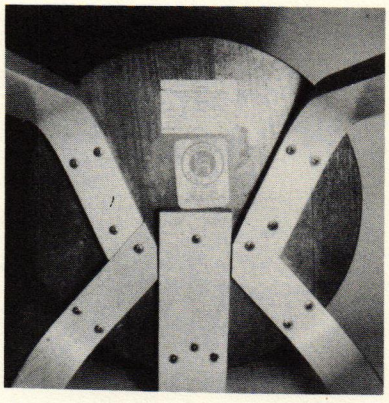

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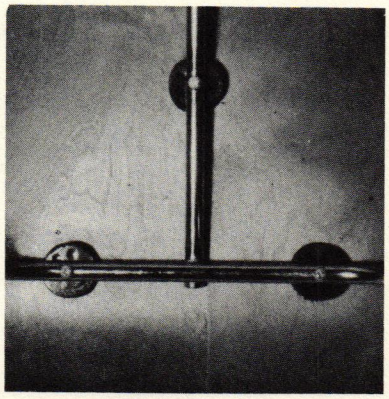

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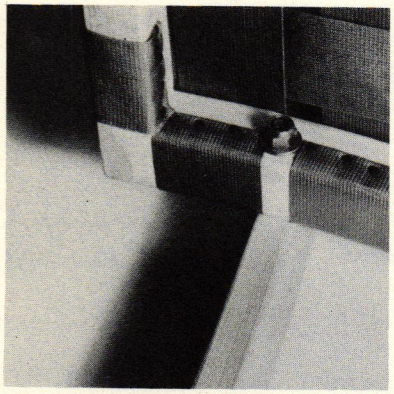

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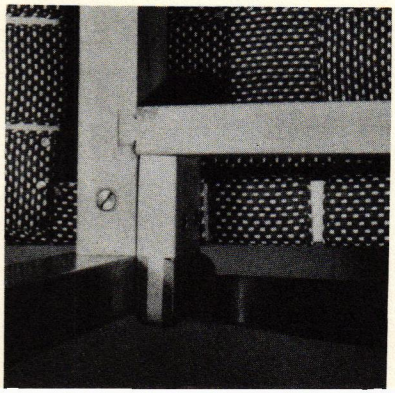

6

captions

1 Barwa—of aluminum tubing with a removable, heavy duck cover — may be tipped back for relaxation
designed by Bartolucci-Waldheim
manufactured by Waldheim Associates

2 completely adjustable work chair with upholstered back and seat of molded plywood and foam rubber
designed by Odelberg-Olson
manufactured by Knoll

3 lounge chair of metal and foam rubber
manufactured by Knoll

4 solid birch chair with a comfortable shaped back and saddle seat
designed by George Nakashima
manufactured by Knoll

5 light weight, mar proof, molded Zenaloy and Fiberglas chair
designed by Charles Eames
manufactured by Herman Miller

6 upholstered dining chair of molded plastic and foam rubber with aluminum legs
designed by Eero Saarinen
manufactured by Knoll

7 chair of metal and canvas
designed by Milo Baughman
manufactured by Pacific Iron

8 webbed lounge chair — laminated birch frame —with resilient cantilever construction
designed by Alvar Aalto
manufactured in Finland
distributed by Finsven

9 side chair of metal and foam rubber with a back that flexes
designed by Dorothy Schindele
manufactured by Modern Color

10 lounge chair with a solid birch frame, foam rubber cushions, removable slip covers
designed by Jens Risom
manufactured by Jens Risom

11 lounge chair constructed of metal, springs and rubberized hair
designed by Milo Baughman
manufactured by Pacific Iron

12 birch stacking stool of laminated bentwood
manufactured in Switzerland
distributed by Fraser's

13 expanded metal all-weather chair
designed by Van Keppel-Green
manufactured by Van Keppel-Green

14 chrome plated steel tubing frame, back and seat of white, washable cord—a stackable dining chair
designed by Andre Dupres
manufactured by Knoll

15 light weight, molded plywood chair with chrome plated metal legs
designed by Ray Komai
manufactured by JG

16 walnut armchair with string back and seat
designed by Irving Sabo
manufactured by JG

17 birch occasional chair, caned back and seat
manufactured by Pascoe

18 rubber shock mounts connecting seat and back to frame produce resiliency in moderately priced molded plywood chair
designed by Charles Eames
manufactured by Herman Miller

19 well made, sturdy children's chair—walnut seat and back, laminated bentwood maple legs —comes 12″ to 14″ high
manufactured by Thonet

20 lounge chair with laminated birch arms, back and seat of foam rubber and cotton felt
designed by Eero Saarinen
manufactured by Knoll

21 bentwood chair with jute webbing
designed by Bruno Matthson
manufactured in Sweden

22 adjustable, knock-down chair of saddle leather and laminated birch
designed by Ilmari Tapiovaara
manufactured by Thonet

23 large, luxurious lounge chair with a molded plastic shell—set in a steel rod cradle—covered in foam rubber, with foam rubber seat cushion, and down filled back cushion
designed by Eero Saarinen
manufactured by Knoll

24 armchair of French walnut and foam rubber with a sculptural quality
designed by Finn Juhl
manufactured in Denmark
distributed by Georg Jensen

25 knock-down chair of fine construction with a laminated beech frame, reversible leather and fabric slip-in seat and back
designed by Peter Hvidt and O. M. Nielsen
manufactured in Denmark
distributed by Herman Miller

26 lounge chair with angle iron frame, arms of ash, back and seat of foam rubber
designed by George Nelson
manufactured by Herman Miller

27 handmade side chair of French walnut with foam rubber seat and back
designed by Finn Juhl
manufactured in Denmark
distributed by Georg Jensen

28 birch lounge chair with foam rubber seat
manufactured by JG

29 inexpensive dining or side chair with woven split reed seat
manufactured for Sears Roebuck

30 side chair, or dining chair — of foam rubber cemented to a steel base—for which a variety of removable covers may be purchased
designed by Karl Lightfoot
manufactured by Lightfoot Studio

31 very low-cost, well constructed bucket chair of birch
manufactured by Union City Chair Company

32 inexpensive side chair of hard beech—lacquered black—with rush seat
designed by Enrico Delmonte
manufactured in Italy
distributed by Waldron

33 moderately priced lounge chair, spring construction
designed by Paul McCobb
manufactured by Custom Craft

34 sturdy, well constructed knock-down chair with a laminated beech frame, back and seat of walnut
designed by Peter Hvidt and O. M. Nielsen
manufactured in Denmark
distributed by Herman Miller

35 easily assembled, inexpensive knock-down chair of birch plywood with foam rubber back and seat
designed and manufactured by Palmer Eide