IT'S HARD
TO FIND A
GOOD LAMP.

Donald Judd

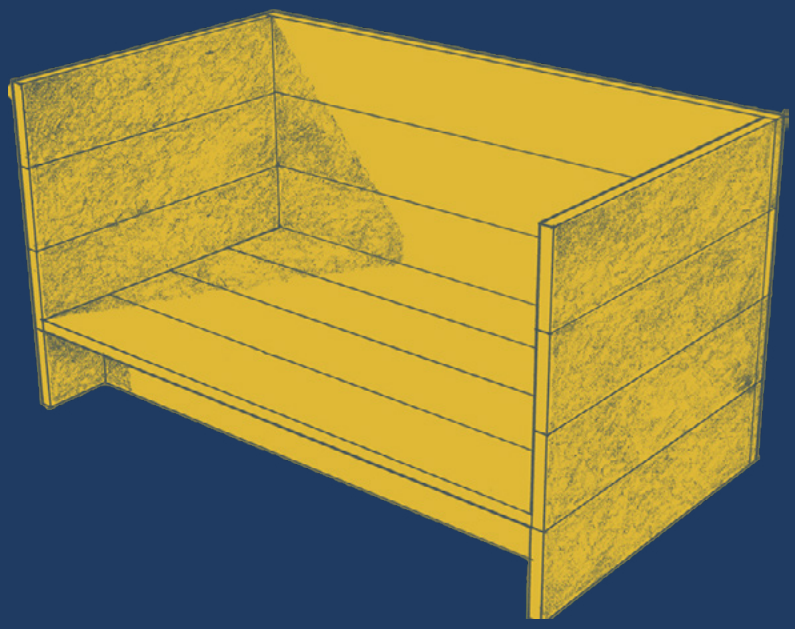
AFTER ALL, THE WORK ISN'T THE POINT; THE PIECE IS.

CONTENTS

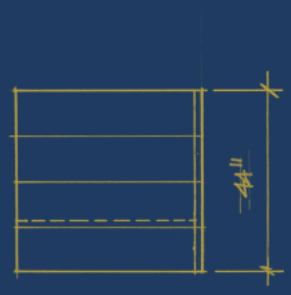
3 Intro

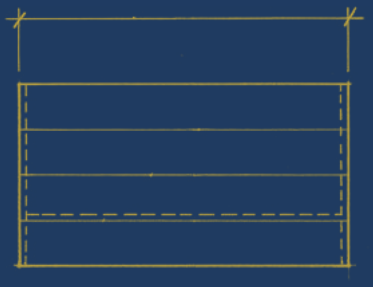
4 Timeline

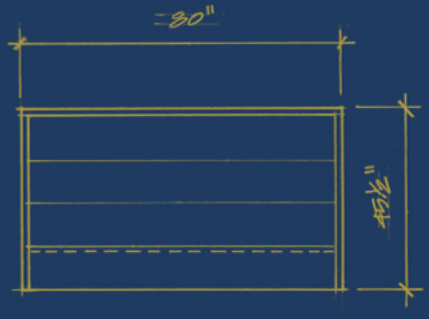
5 Lamp Essay

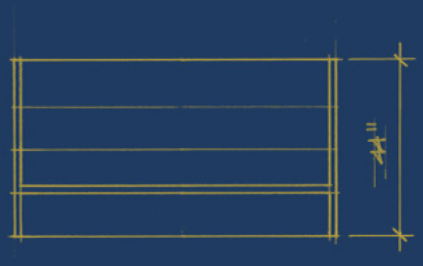


"Single Daybed 32" Made in 1978



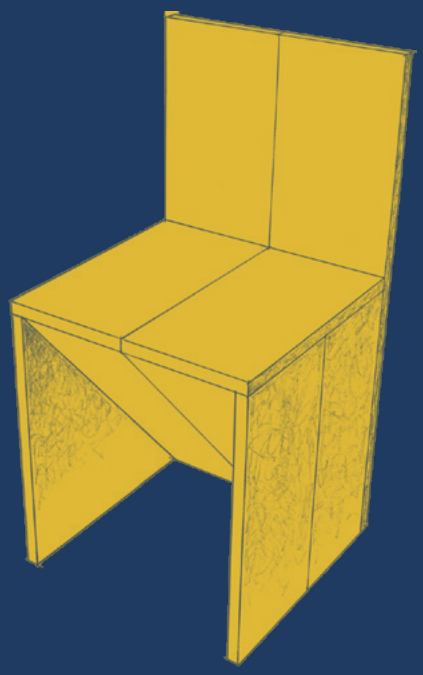




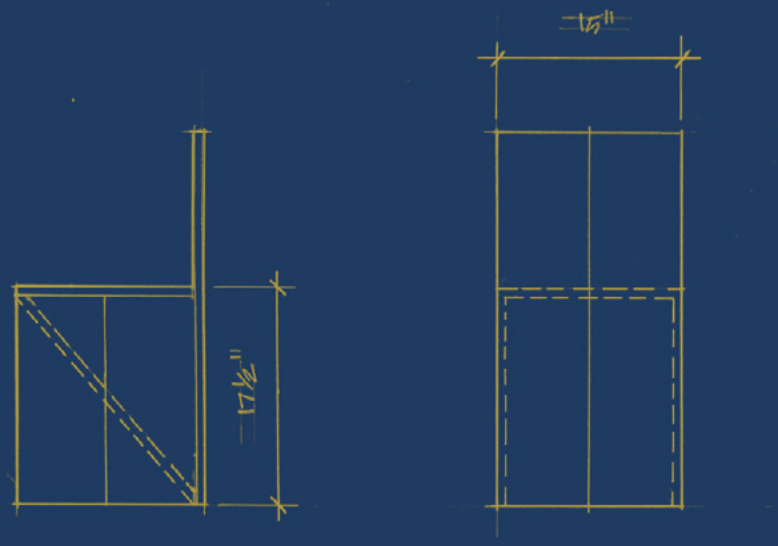


INTRO

Donald Clarence Judd was an American artist associated with minimalism. In his work, Judd sought autonomy and clarity for the constructed object and the space created by it, ultimately achieving a rigorously democratic presentation without compositional hierarchy.



"Backward Slant Chair 84" Made in 1982







TIMELINE

1928 *Born on June 3, 1928 in Excelsior Springs, Missouri.*

1953 *Graduated with B.S. in philosophy from Columbia.*

1957 *1st Solo Show at Panoras Gallery, New York, NY.*

1962 *Judd switches from painting to sculpture.*

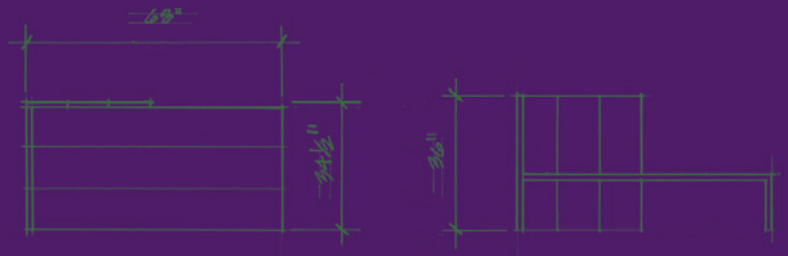
1964 *Judd writes Specific Objects, one of his most popular essays*

1971 *Starts is second studio in Marfa Texas, he creates many large scale permanent installations there.*

1986 *Founds the Chinati Foundation.*

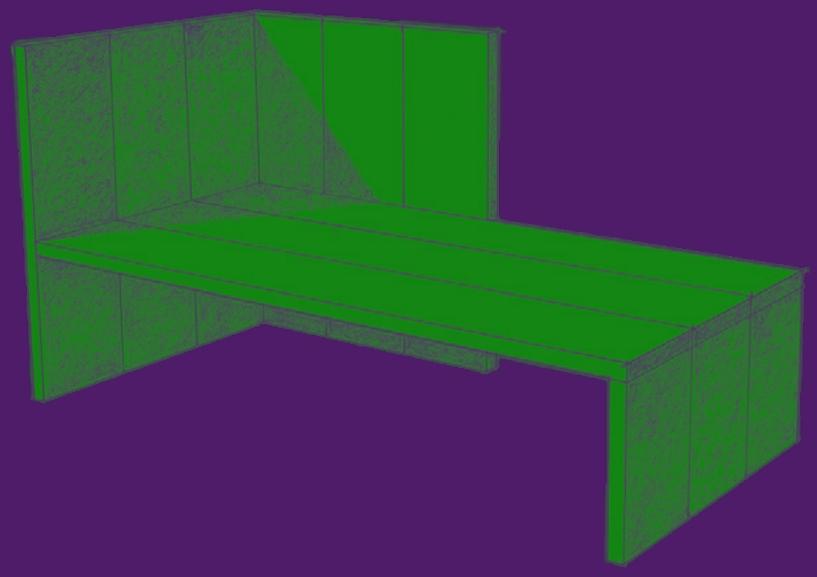
1994 *Sadly Dondald Judd Passes away from lymphoma.*

“THE ART OF A CHAIR”

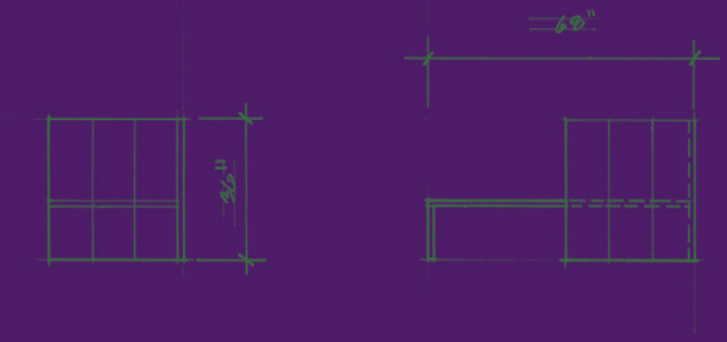


In the middle 1980s I wrote that in the middle 1960s someone asked me to design a coffee table. I thought that a work of mine which was essentially a rectangular volume with the upper surface recessed could be altered. This debased the work and produced a bad table, which I later threw away. The configuration and the scale of art cannot be transposed into furniture and architecture. The intent of art is different from that of the latter, which must be functional. If a chair or a building is not functional, if it appears to be only art, it is ridiculous. The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness, and scale as a chair. These are proportion, which is visible reasonableness. The art in art is partly the assertion of someone’s interest regardless of other considerations. A work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself. And the idea of a chair isn’t a chair. Due to the inability of art to become furniture, I didn’t try again for several years. However, I’ve always been interested in architecture and continued to sketch ideas.

Of course if a person is at once making art and building furniture and architecture there will be similarities. The various interests in form will be consistent. If you like simple forms in art you will not make complicated ones in architecture. “Complicated,” incidentally, is the opposite of “simple,” not “complex,” which both may be. But the difference between art and architecture is fundamental. Furniture and architecture can only be approached as such. Art cannot be imposed upon them. If their nature is seriously considered the art will occur, even art close to art itself. The mistake I made with the table was to try to make something as unusual as I thought the work of art to be. Back of this was the assumption that a good chair was only a good chair, that a chair could only be improved or changed slightly, and that nothing new could be done without a great, strange effort. But the furniture slowly became new as I dealt easily with the reality. A good chair is a good chair.

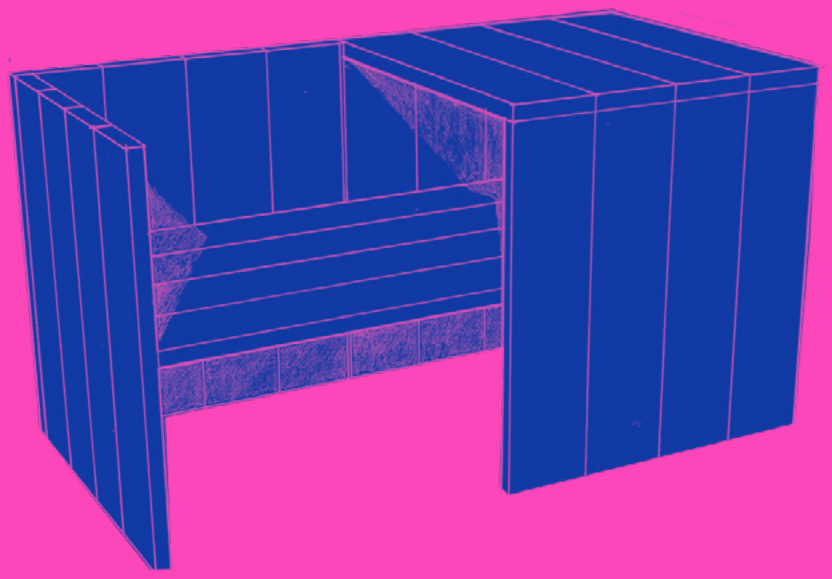


“Wintergarden Bench 16” Made in 1980



The particulars slowly created the general forms that could not be directly transferred. I can now make a chair or a building that is mine without trying to derive forms from my own works of art. After a few years I designed a pair of sinks for an old building that I bought in New York City and for which I’ve designed much subsequently. These were designed directly as sinks; they were not a conversion; I didn’t confuse them with art.

The basin of the sink is an ellipse, which so far I’ve never used in art, instead of a circle, which I do use. I also designed a large table with chairs, somewhat like benches, to be made of folded one-eighth-inch stainless steel, brass, or copper. These were never made because the fourth floor of the building in which it was to be is very open, primarily two planes, floor and ceiling, while the table and chairs are very closed. The latter would ruin the space. I later made some bookshelves for the third floor.

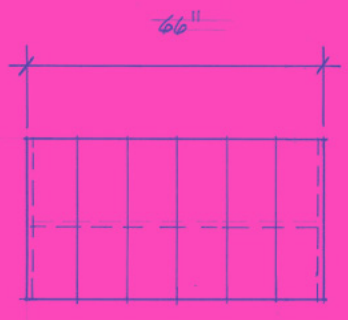


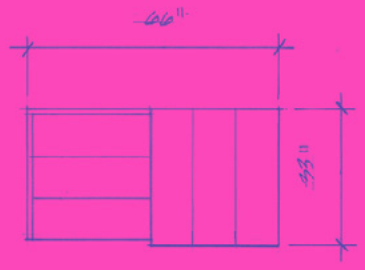
"Seat/Table Bench 31" Made in 1982

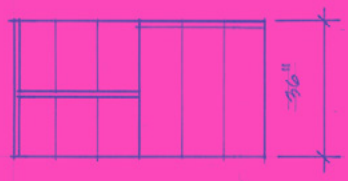
I kept the building but moved to West Texas with my two children, where I rented a small house on the edge of town. The house was quartered into eleven-by-eleven-foot rooms. There was no furniture and none to be bought, either old, since the town had not shrunk or changed much since its beginning in 1883, or new, since the few stores sold only fake antiques or tubular kitchen furniture with plastic surfaces printed with inane geometric patterns and flowers. The two small children played and slept in one of the four rooms. In order to give them each an area of their own notwithstanding the one room, I designed a bed which was a closed platform of one-by-twelves with a central, free-standing wall, also of one-by-twelves.

The bed was designed so that the lumberyard could cut the few different lengths to size and I could then nail them together in place. I liked the bed a great deal, and in fact the whole house, for which I made other furniture. Later, in a large place in town, I designed desks and chairs for the children using the same method of construction. More furniture developed from this beginning.





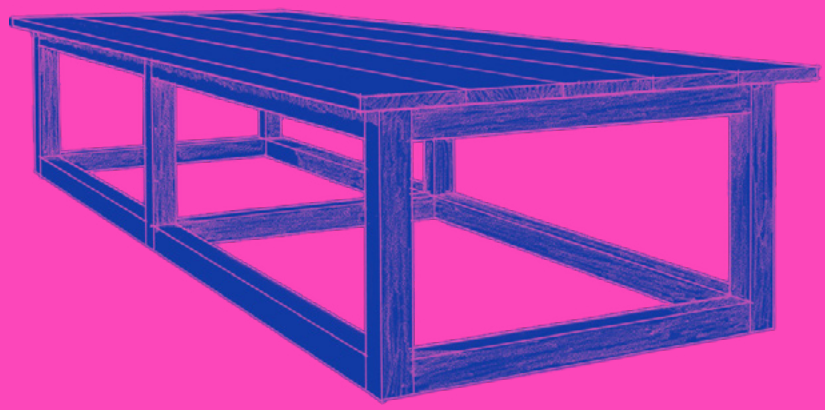




It's impossible to go to the store and buy a chair. In North America since the "Mission" style became unfashionable in the 1920s and in England since the similar furniture derived from William Morris also became unfashionable, there has been no furniture which is pleasurable to look at, fairly available, and moderate in price. The only exception is the bentwood furniture developed by Thonet, which became less fashionable in the 1920s but has continued to be made until now by Thonet and others. This is still not expensive but it is not down the street in the store. The furniture designed in the 1920s by the well-known architects that continues to be made is expensive for most people, although not as expensive as the materials and the construction imply, and is hardly nearby to purchase. Neither is all of it agreeable.

Mies van der Rohe's is still the best and should not be considered as only a worn status symbol. As bad ideas should not be accepted because they are fashionable, good ideas should not be rejected because they are unfashionable. Conventions are not worth reacting to one way or another. Most of the other furniture in production, such as Breuer's Wassily chair and Le Corbusier's furniture, is an early civilized and almost forgivable sentimentalizing of the machine. The chairs of both architects are derived from the better camping and military chairs of the nineteenth century. Old good ideas made new and shiny are now a dismaying precedent. Sentimentalizing the machine is now a malignity of the century. This is present in most available furniture and in most buildings. It is extreme in Pompidou and Lloyd's. In furniture this puerility is usually combined with the puerility of domesticity, the societal progress of the machine with personal progress in the society.

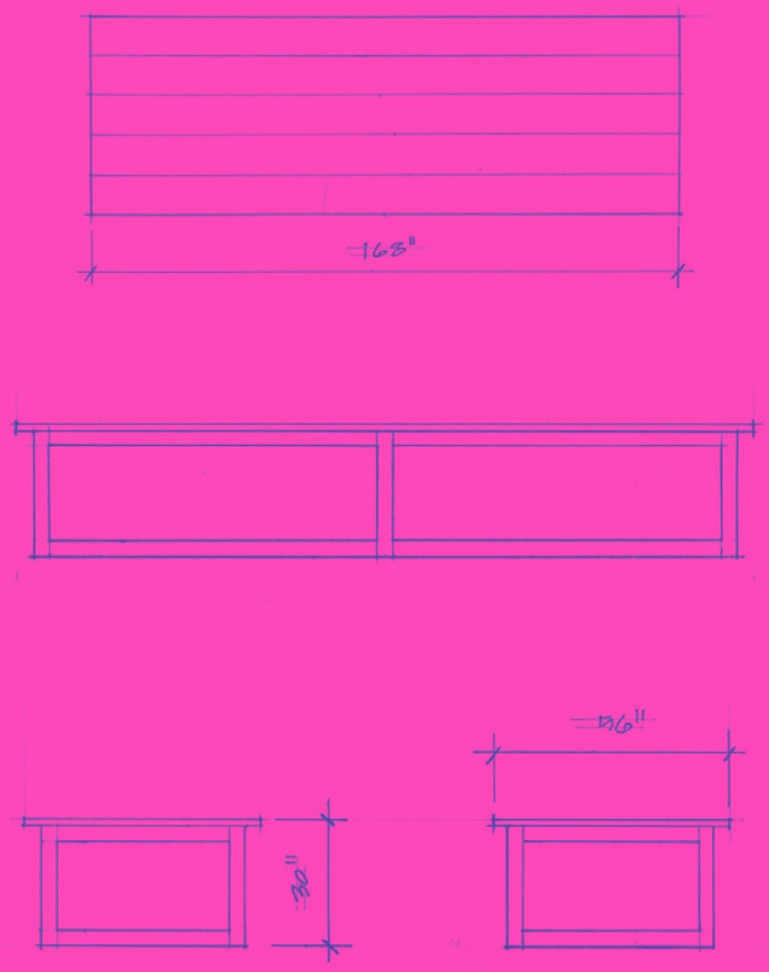
“JUNK FOR CONSUMERS”



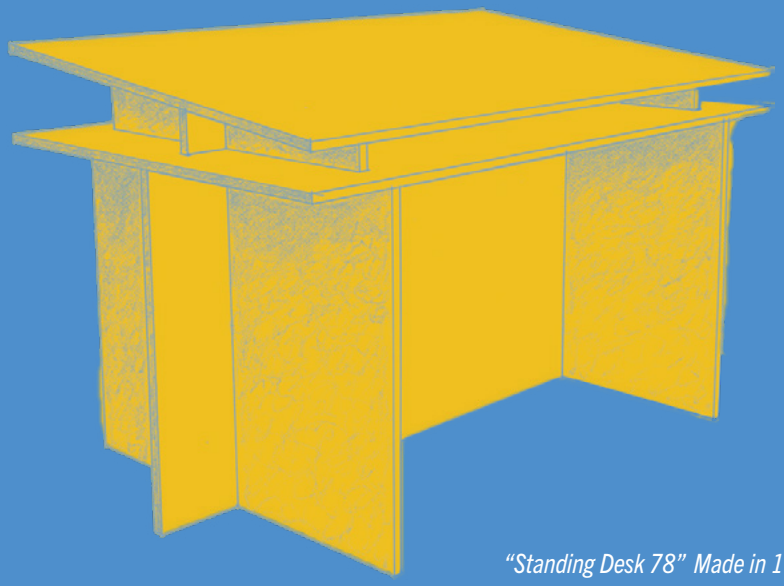
“Library Table 13” Made in 1978

Almost all furniture made since the 1920s and much before in any of the “styles,” “modern” and “traditional,” has been junk for consumers. As I’ve written, the ornate and overstuffed furniture of the last half of the nineteenth century, crowded into corresponding rooms, was not supplanted by simple and functional modern furniture. Instead, this was turned into Victorian furniture, also crowded into matching rooms. Decoration isn’t just applied; a chair is decorated. Modern, progressive furniture has been corrupted into the opposite. Primarily, “traditional” furniture, Victorian furniture, continues. It’s ordinarily what’s in the store. This is what most people have to choose from, whether in Yellowknife or New York. As in politics, this furniture is not traditional and conservative but is an imitation of past furniture. The appearance of the past represents status by invoking a higher class in the past than the purchaser is in in the present. The imitation old furniture symbolizes up and the imitation modern symbolizes forward. Usually the first is in the home and the second is in the office, sometimes one or the other in both, and seldom the reverse. Good office furniture is also difficult to find.

The bizarre and complicated “modern” office of the rich executive, who has photographs on his desk of his wife and children in their traditional setting, is a summation of the surrounding corporate headquarters. Since he or his wife is on the board of the museum, it must look progressive, like the headquarters, but with a touch of tradition, for her, for upward mobility to the past, for something better than business, such as learning, although there is nothing better, and, generally for the gentility of art, which symbolizes all of these. Then, also, he may be on the town council, or he builds shopping centers, or he builds apartment houses, giving the people what they want, to go with the furniture in which they had no choice. Upward and forward, and lower every year, not only in architecture and art, but economically and politically, since reality is equally absent. Anyway, what kind of a society is it when you can’t even buy a chair?



“FREE ENTERPRISE”

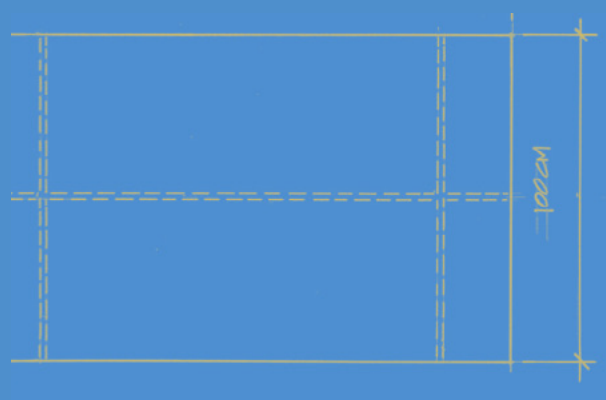


“Standing Desk 78” Made in 1990

Architects, designers, businesspeople, even politicians, say that they are giving the people what they want. They are giving the people what they deserve, because of their negligence, but they are presumptuous to claim to know what they want. What they want is what they get. An exception to imposing upon the public what they want, or perhaps a rare good guess, is the design of Sony television sets and other equipment of some other Japanese companies and of some European companies. This has no relation to traditional Japanese architecture, which is fortunate, because if it did the new version of the old would be just as debased as it is in the United States. Department stores in Osaka are floor after floor of kitsch, as they are in New York. And always surprisingly, and always everywhere, new Japanese and Korean architecture show no fundamental lessons learned from their past architecture, the same as in Paris. In the United States the television machine began disguised and continues as at once the myth of the machine and the myth of the old home. The Americans gave the Americans what they wanted; they didn’t want it. Neither did anyone else. In addition to the success of Sony’s design, there is the smaller success of Braun, whose design must be the model, somewhat better, as earlier usually is, for Sony’s design. A few months ago there was a curious article in Lufthansa’s magazine justly praising Braun and its chief designer, Dieter Rams, praising “German” design of course, but explaining that “German” design was now second to “Italian” design (consumer products are not where nations differ in design) but that Germany would catch up. This means become worse. “Designer” Italian furniture is the world’s worst.

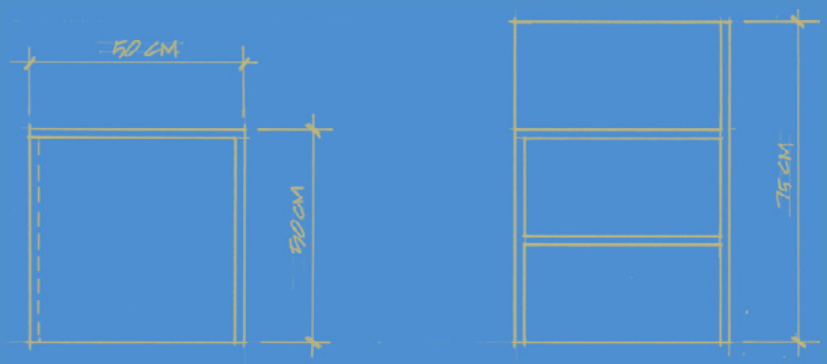
The only things as bad are the plastic bottles for liquid soap. It is an exception and a possibility that you can go down the street and choose a TV and enjoy looking at it when it’s turned off. In Texas, when I made the first furniture, I wanted a television set. This wasn’t down the street, but almost so, twenty-five miles away. All the sets were American, all were made of plastic imitating wood, some like your Anglo grandmother’s sideboard, some like your Italian grandmother’s credenza, some like your Latino grandmother’s aparador. I chose an Anglo set by Zenith. Again as usual, the design and the technology were congruent. The color was that of the first colored comic strip, printed during an earthquake.

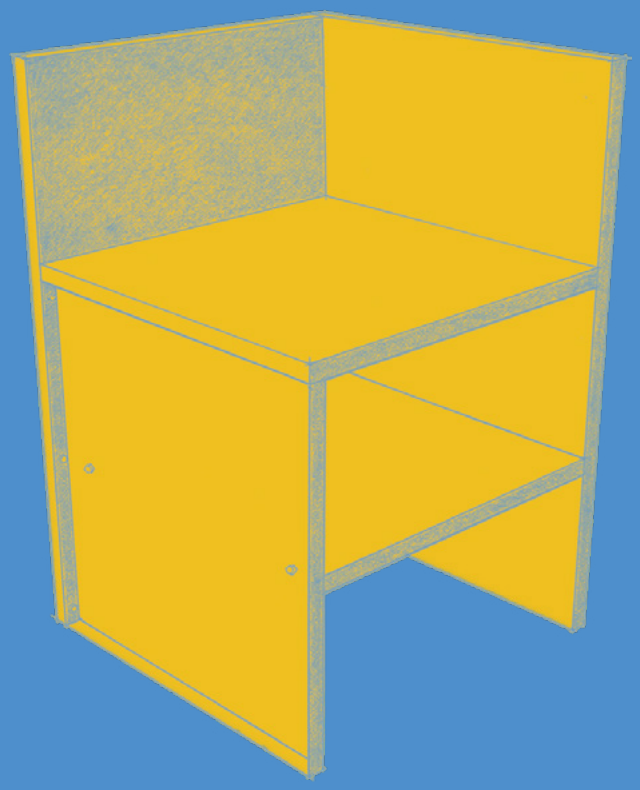


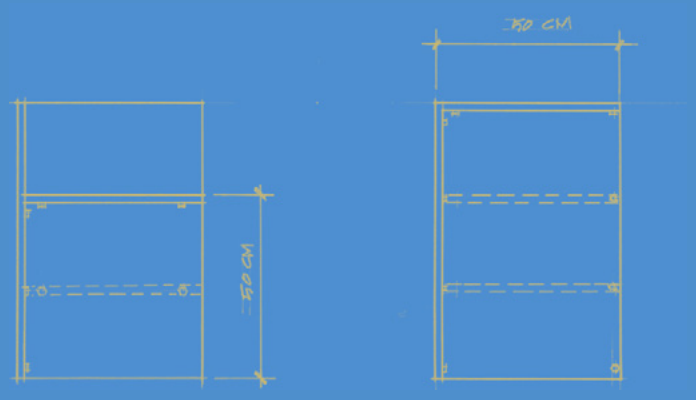


Most of the furniture that I have designed remains fairly expensive, because of its methods of construction, and it is not easily available. We have made a serious effort to lower the prices but the furniture is handmade, basically even the sheet-metal pieces made by Janssen, one by one. These would be cheaper made by hundreds but still there would be considerable handwork. The wooden furniture cannot change. Lower prices require great numbers, which require a large distribution. This usually leads to the department store. The distribution of furniture, and of books, probably of most things, are monopolies against diversity, which eliminate exceptions and complication, which have an invariable scheme for production and for costs, and of course for appearance, and, for books, subject matter. For both furniture and books the designer and the author absolutely receive very little. The production cost of furniture is not as fixed as the cost of the designer, but it is low. The cost of the designer must have developed from that of real modern furniture, since the architect was always dead. The producer, not the factory, and the retailer, or both as one, receive the most money, some as profit, some for the expenses of the distribution and the salesroom. This makes an impossible price. And of course it seems that the middleman should get less. The larger the distribution the more to the middleman. Therefore the best method is a small distribution, which is what we do. And, importantly, we are the producers, which combines that profit and my profit into one, leaving only the retailer as extra. Our furniture goes around the world, but only one by one. Most things could be made in the area in which they are consumed, eliminating the big distributor, often one company charging for three functions, instead of two for one as in our case, charging three times as the distributor, the producer, and the manufacturer, that is, profiting as corporations. Almost anything they can do anyone can do anywhere. And obviously even cars and TVs could be made by any large city or small country. I have always thought it strange that there are no cars built in Switzerland. I have heard that there was once a company. Why should Texas import cars and trucks from Michigan?

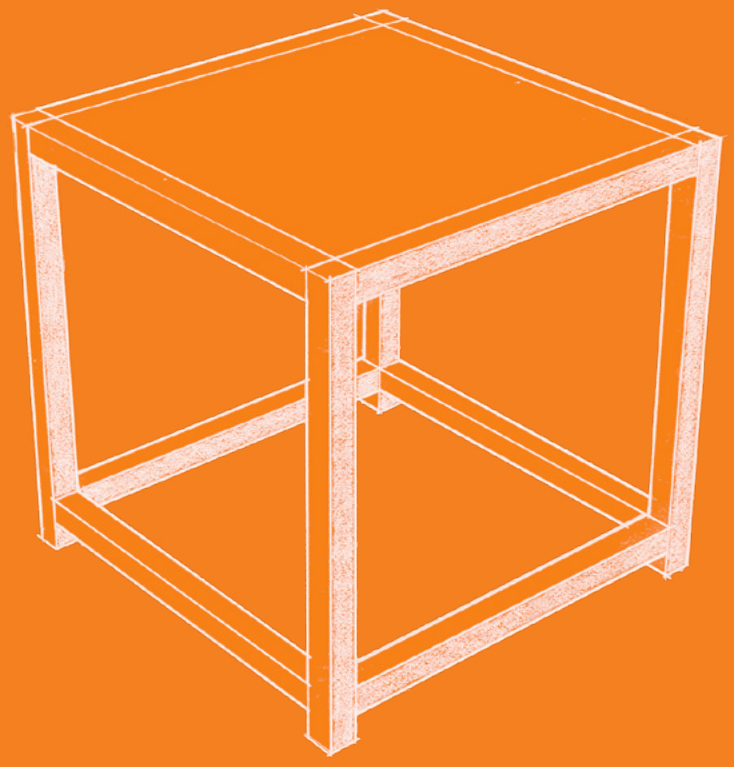
The oligarchy of monopolies of distribution prevents innovation, invents only restrictions, and raises blank walls. The flat and boring society is a maze of blank walls just above eye level. This prevents new and real inventions, so obviously there is no chance for only a new chair or a little book. The purpose of big business is to maintain its oligarchy rather than to do anything else, for example, to fulfill two of its biggest claims, competition and innovation. Efficiency is another claim, part of progress, efficiency for profit, not necessarily for production, and not for the public. Only in the mythical "progress" is there a suggestion of benefiting society. Most businesspeople think that such slight altruism is part of their advertising. And "free enterprise" is a slogan of the Pentagon.







"Corner Chair 15" Made in 1984



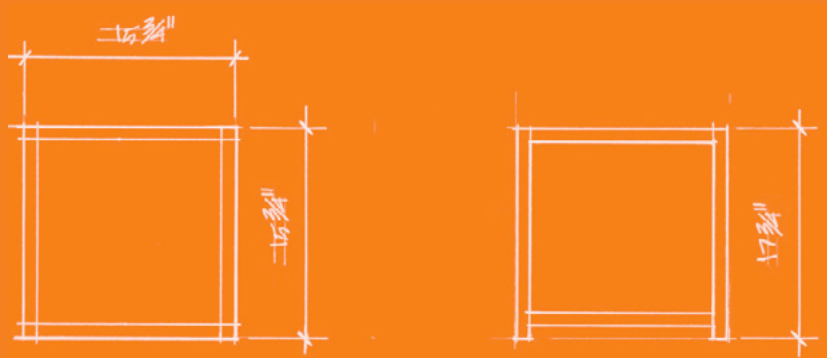
"Library Stool 42" Made in 1980

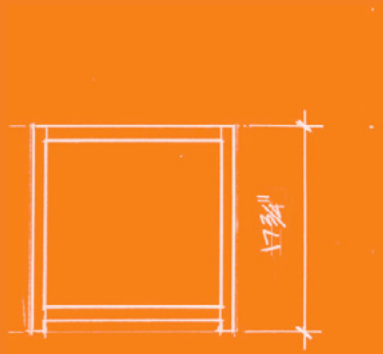
Noam Chomsky writes:

Free trade is fine for economics departments and newspaper editorials, but nobody in the corporate world or the government takes the doctrines seriously. The parts of the US economy that are able to compete internationally are primarily the state-subsidized ones: capital-intensive agriculture (agribusiness, as it's called), high-tech industry, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, etc.

The same is true of other industrial societies. The US government has the public pay for research and development and provides, largely through the military, a state-guaranteed market for waste production. If something is marketable, the private sector takes it over. That system of public subsidy and private profit is what is called free enterprise.

My experience is that both furniture distribution and book distribution are impossible. On the other hand the art business is such a one-horse business that something larger seems better. But this is perhaps because the context for art is so weak. The only possible way, perhaps, to make cheap mass-produced furniture is to start with a construction cost and to design accordingly. At present we would have to debase the construction of the existing furniture for mass production. Beginning from a fixed construction cost still leaves the questions of too little to the designer and too much to the producer-organizer-wholesaler and to the retailer.



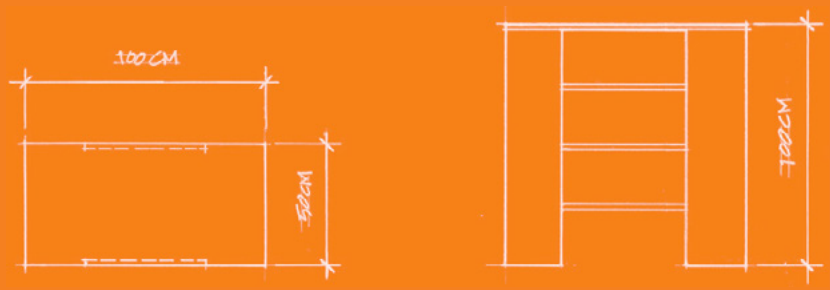


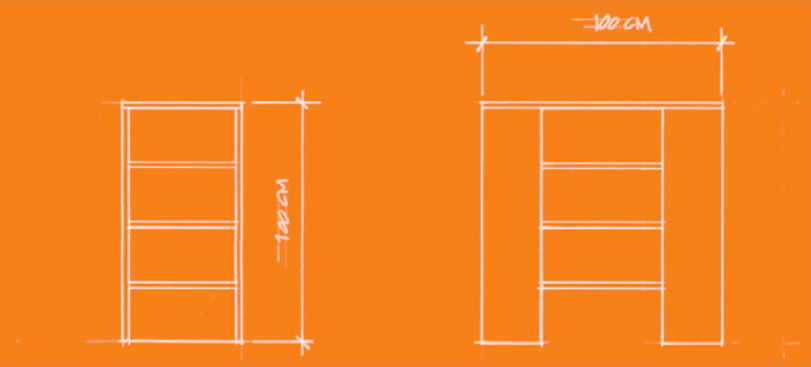


“DEBASE THE CONSTRUCTION”



“Bookshelf 14” Made in 1984



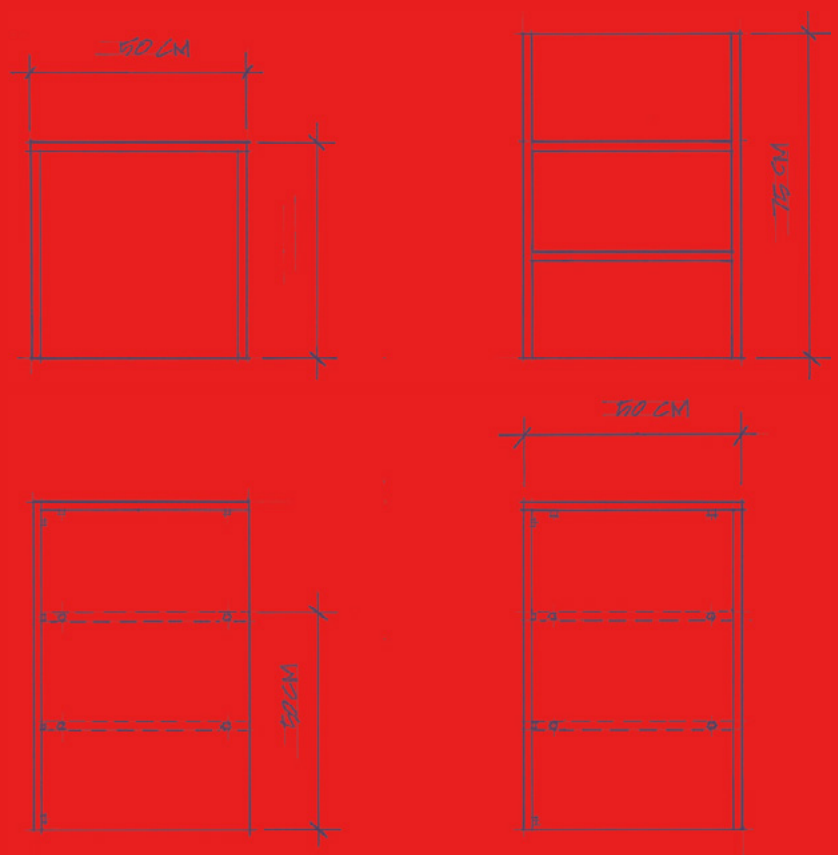


The roughly made pine furniture made by me and others in Texas was made first, with a few exceptions. So far this has not been made for sale. Next, well-made furniture in fine solid wood was made for my building in New York and then in small numbers to sell, as it still is. The wood and the craftsmanship make this the most expensive. In 1984 I designed some chairs, benches, a table, and some beds in sheet metal, which were painted one color to a piece. There were also a couple of chairs and a table made of copper. This was for myself but also was the first furniture to begin as furniture to sell. Since this was sheet metal and the construction is common, I thought it would be cheap enough to be used outdoors in public, but there is still too much handwork. Until then, except for the first pine chairs, all of the furniture was somewhat heavy. Five years ago I designed some light chairs and two tables in solid wood. These are simply but well made in Yorkshire. Similar ones were made recently for outdoors in galvanized steel and of granite, again heavy, and also in Texas in painted steel and of slate. A few years ago, first for use, then for sale, desks, tables, and a bench were made in Cologne of clear plywood. The sheets of plywood are cut as little as possible and are slipped together, interlocking, like a children’s toy, an old idea. These also, sometimes with the plywood coated commercially with a color, as well as chairs like those in pine, are made in New York.

“FURNITURE IS FURNITURE”

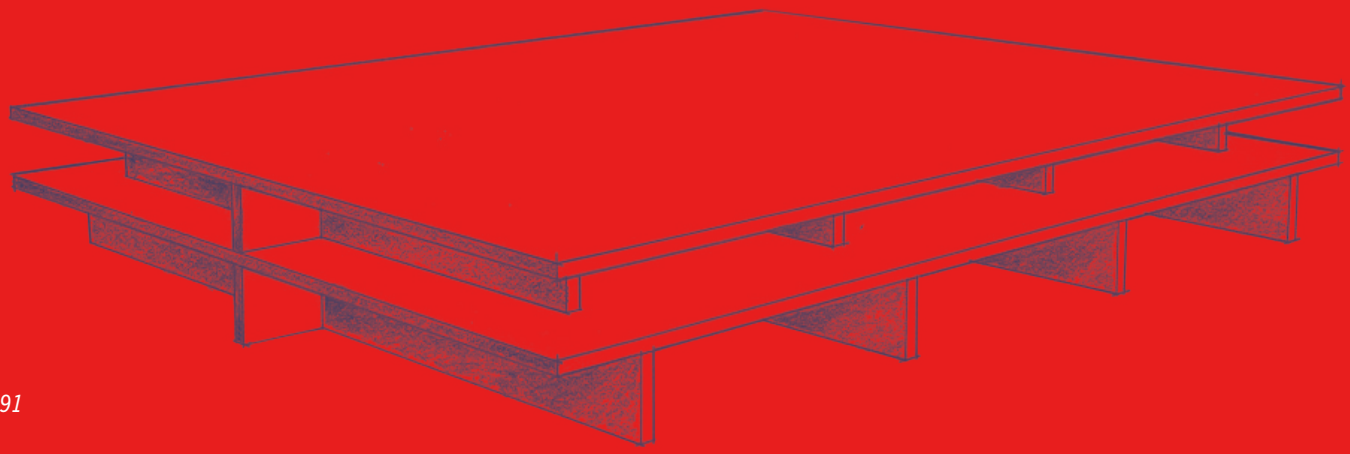


“Armchair 1” Made in 1984



I am often asked if the furniture is art, since almost ten years ago some artists made art that was also furniture. The furniture is furniture and is only art in that architecture, ceramics, textiles, and many things are art. We try to keep the furniture out of art galleries to avoid this confusion, which is far from my thinking. And also to avoid the consequent inflation of the price. I am often told that the furniture is not comfortable, and in that not functional. The source of the question is in the overstuffed bourgeois Victorian furniture, which, as I said, never ceased.

The furniture is comfortable to me. Rather than making a chair to sleep in or a machine to live in, it is better to make a bed. A straight chair is best for eating or writing. The third position is standing.



“Plywood Bed 87-rectangle” Made in 1991

