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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO PRESENT ENTIRELY NEW TYPE OF CHAIR
IN EXHIBITION OF ORGANIC DESIGN OPENING SEPTEMBER 24

A group of chairs whose construction principle is a wooden shell cast like a piece of sculpture will be the high point of the exhibition of Organic Design in Home Furnishings which the Museum will open to the public Wednesday, September 24. The chairs and the other furniture and furnishings to be shown in the exhibition have been manufactured from the prize-winning designs in the inter-American Competition held by the Museum's Department of Industrial Design from September 30, 1940 to January 11, 1941. Its purpose was to discover good designers and engage them in the task of creating a better environment for modern living. Eliot Noyes, Director of the Museum's Department of Industrial Design, managed the Competition and has designed the installation for the exhibition.

Simultaneously with the opening of the exhibition in New York, twelve leading department stores in large cities throughout the country, will put the furniture on sale. In this way, for the first time, authoritative recognition of good designs will coincide with the availability of these designs as merchandise. Through the cooperation of the sponsoring department stores and manufacturers the Museum has been able to eliminate the time-lag between theory and application--a condition heretofore tending to discourage public interest in good design.

Now, in the exhibition opening at the Museum of Modern Art Wednesday, prize-winning designs will not be mere dreams in blueprint. They will be obtainable as finished products at Bloomingdale's in New York; L. S. Ayres & Company, Indianapolis; Barker Bros., Los Angeles; Famous-Barr Co., St. Louis; Marshall Field & Company, Chicago; Gimbel Bros., Philadelphia; Jordan Marsh Company, Boston; The Halle Bros. Co., Cleveland; The J. L. Hudson Company, Detroit; Kaufmann Department Stores, Pittsburgh; the F. & R. Lazarus & Co., Columbus; and Wolf & Dessauer, Fort Wayne.

To give the new chairs and the other prize-winning furniture

and furnishings their proper setting, the Museum is rebuilding all of the gallery space on its first floor and has even built a temporary additional gallery which extends into the garden. This new small gallery has its own covered terrace where visitors may sit on the new garden furniture and look diagonally in at the rest of the exhibition through the rear glass walls of the Museum. One of these walls has been removed to make the new temporary gallery a continuous part of the exhibition space.

The visitor enters the exhibition by going up a specially constructed ramp to a runway several feet above the large central portion of the exhibition space. The visitor may either look down at the unit furniture assembled in this central space or he may follow the "projection track" to his right. This projection track furnishes a pictorial history of the contemporaneous background against which the modern chair has been developed. At intervals above the projection track are hung actual chairs as they emerged in the history of modern chair design. The projection track starts with a photograph of objects displayed in the Crystal Palace, London, 1851. It continues with reproductions of advertisements in furniture, furnishings, automobiles and other equipment of daily living, photographs of women in the varying styles of the succeeding decades--there is even a photograph of the first ladies' lawn tennis team in 1880, wearing the proper sports outfit of that period.

The chairs which appear in actuality or enlarged photographs above the projection track include the Morris Chair; a Thonet bentwood bench designed in about 1880; the first tubular metal chair by Breuer; the Miës van der Rohe chair with spring steel legs; the lounging chair with tubular steel frame by Le Corbusier; bent plywood chairs by Aalto; and other plywood designs by Breuer and by Bruno Mathsson of Sweden. In his commentary on chair design in the catalog which will be published simultaneously with the exhibition, Mr. Noyes writes:

> "Into the artistic confusion which occurred when machines began to flood the everyday scene with articles the design of which was a fumbling imitation of hand crafts, came William Morris. A great revolutionary figure, he realized that art no longer existed as a normal function of life. Declaring that the machine was incapable of producing art, he called for a return to arts and crafts.
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> "His observation was correct, but his remedy was negative and fundamentally wrong. While others were to recognize the positive qualities which machine production could offer, Morris had at least taken a major step in his insistence that art and design must be a normal part of life.

For this reason it may be said that Morris is the first important figure in the modern movement; for these qualities the 'Morris Chair,' while probably not designed by Morris himself, may be called the first modern chair.

"From Morris' time until today, three distinct aspects of design may be observed in action. One of these is the reactionary, decorative, arts and crafts approach to design. The validity of traditional ornament was quickly undermined by the Industrial Revolution, and immediately there came attempts to create new decorative formulae to replace it. Art Nouveau at the turn of the century, the Viennese Kunstgewerbe, the decorative trivialities of Paris in 1925, and finally streamlining (as a decorative formula) are all of this package.

"A second aspect of design is contributed, often unconsciously, by men who, while working with materials and new machines find new forms and new ways of making things. Still a third aspect of design is that in which designers of vision, recognizing the temper of the new industrial world which is coming into being, try to come to terms with the machine and its implications."

As the visitor steps off the ramp, he will see caged off in a small alcove an overstuffed monster of a chair such as can be bought in stores today. This chair is presented by the Museum as a horrible example in conflict with the modern tendency and necessity to decrease the weight and bulk of our furnishings to fit into homes shrinking to ever smaller sizes. This chair is presented in dismembered condition so that the visitor may fully comprehend what goes on today inside much overstuffed furniture, where the bulk is usually intentional rather than the result of clumsy technique. Completed, this overstuffed monster weighs about sixty pounds; without legs and cover, forty-five pounds. The frame consists of thirty-one separate pieces of wood screwed or glued in rigid, heavy construction; this frame supports nineteen springs tied and braced with baling wire, twine, heavy webbing and burlap. On top of all this are applied a fibre pad, a load of hair, cotton padding and finally the upholstery material.

To emphasize further the monstrous qualities of this furniture-gorilla which inhabits many of our homes today, the Museum has hung at the back of its cage a poster of Gargantua the Great which the chair with its clumsy, outstretched arms and heavy-haunched squat strikingly resembles. Attached to the cage is a label in proper zoo form:

OVERSTUFFED ARMCHAIR

Cathedra gargantua, genus Americanus. Weight when fully matured, 60 pounds. Habitat, the American home. Devours little children, pencils, fountain pens, bracelets, clips, earrings, scissors, hairpins, and other small flora and fauna of the domestic jungle. Is rapidly becoming extinct.

√ Turning from this exhibit in horror the visitor sees several of the newer chairs presented for the first time in the exhibition. Parts of the sections are cut away so that the construction processes

may be understood. A tremendous step toward simplification and lightness is shown in a new spring which can be attached directly to a light wooden chair frame. Still more advanced steps are shown until the visitor comes to the entirely new structural idea in chair design.

This chair, which comes in four variations, has been originated by Eero Saarinen and Charles O. Eames of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, who are the winners not only in Category A: Seating for a Living Room; but also in Category B: Other Furniture for a Living Room. The original full scale model for the chair is molded by the designers in plaster and wire netting to fit the contours of the human anatomy somewhat as a sculptor makes his first plaster cast. The shape of this plaster-and-netting chair is then transferred to a cast-iron mold in which the final chair shell is fabricated. The substance of the chair itself is formed of alternate layers of thin sheets of wood and glue laminated in the cast-iron form under intense pressure and heat. When removed from the cast the completed shell needs only to be trimmed and to have legs attached, which completes the structural part of the chair. A thin rubber pad is then applied over the inner side of the shell to be covered by upholstery material.

In the catalog Mr. Noyes explains this new principle in chair-making by contrasting it with the older method, as follows:

> "In an ordinary chair there are a seat and a back which support the body at two or three points. In the case of a usual large upholstered chair the body sinks into a general softness until it reaches support. The principle in these chairs by Saarinen and Eames is that of continuous contact and support, with a thin rubber pad for softness at all points. In this way more comfortable support is secured with a minimum of material, and the finished chair weighs twenty pounds as compared with the sixty-pound Gargantua shown as a horrible example. While the new chairs as first produced must be expensive, the principle involved is sound and it is reasonable to expect that with further development the chairs will come into moderate price brackets."

After the exhibition of Organic Design in Home Furnishings closes at the Museum of Modern Art it will be circulated to other museums and art galleries throughout the country.