

WALTER K.

# Characters

Of people, brands and furniture

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# Of people, brands and furniture

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to be presenting you with the first edition of “Characters” – the new magazine from Walter K. It tells of people who inspire us. Brands we work with. And the furniture we create. What do they all have in common? Personality and excellence.

It takes personality and courage to create something new that is here to stay. And it takes excellence and craftsmanship to transform an idea into the shape that makes it sustainable, precious and classic.

Which is why we are pleased to be introducing you to some of the most striking personalities of our times – in interviews, reports and pictures. From his London base, Norman Foster in collaboration with Walter K. has just created an iconic masterpiece, *Foster 620*, a new type of upholstered bench for large, urban spaces (page 128). In Vienna, the designers at EOOS came up with nothing less than the re-definition of the desk. *Tama Desk* is a song of form and shape. A sculpture for visionaries (page 94). In Tokyo, creative director Kashiwa Sato was searching for clear-cut, bold furniture to design a puristic interior for a Japanese pharmaceuticals company – and found what he was looking for at Walter K. (page 50).

A piece of furniture is only Walter K. if it has personality. And for that to be the case, down to the very last detail, it needs the attitude and expertise of our construction engineers, seamstresses and upholsterers. This is where everything comes full circle, a circle of excellence. And it's the reason why, in this first edition, we also present the people who turn the ideas of the architects and designers into excellent pieces of furniture, which above all else have one essential ingredient: character.

Enjoy your journey of discovery reading our magazine. For news and more information take a look at our website. We look forward to welcoming you to Herrenberg!

Sincerely yours,



Markus Benz



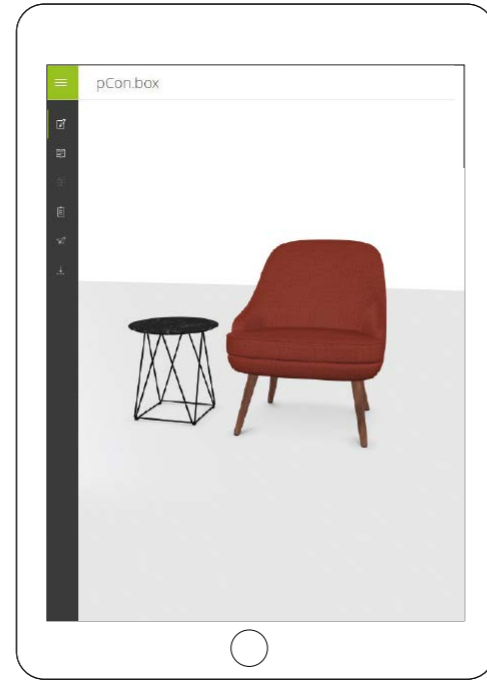
MARKUS BENZ  
CEO, Walter K.

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# People

People shape progress and spawn innovation. They set up companies, create brands, construct buildings – sometimes even entire worlds – and fit them out. But what connects all this? How do ideas, attitudes and values become things of value? Seven managers, makers and creatives reveal what is important to them, what inspires them. And what influence furniture by Walter K. has on their lives

“We moved into an unusual building  
and wanted furniture that emanated  
both innovation and stability.  
At Walter K., we found  
what we were looking for.”

Read the interview with Koen Maerevoet about **MINDFULNESS** on page 20



# Barbara Knoflach

BNP Paribas Real Estate, Frankfurt

Barbara Knoflach enjoys her view from the thirty-third floor of the Frankfurt OpernTurm. Exec-V desk, Leadchair Executive chair by Walter K.

“Spaces shape people, I’m convinced of that.”

Read the interview with Barbara Knoflach on **QUALITY** on page 21



Frank Dopheide in the *Silent Chair* by Walter K.,  
the favorite armchair of the Handelsblatt editors.  
Together with the occasional table and pouf,  
it belongs to the *Seating Stones* range from Walter K.

# Frank Dopheide

Handelsblatt Media Group, Dusseldorf

“Walter K. suits us to a T –  
like the Handelsblatt, it stands  
for excellent products.  
And astounding experience.”

You can read the interview with Frank Dopheide on **BRANDS** on page 22



# Kashiwa Sato

Samurai Inc., Tokyo

“In every object there is an archaic function. I follow this design principle. And I know that Walter K. does too.”

Read the conversation with Kashiwa Sato about **NATURALNESS** on page 23

Kashiwa Sato, creative director and CEO of the agency Samurai Inc., has covered the walls of a Tokyo-based pharmaceutical company with stylized Japanese characters made of wood. Foster 500 armchair by Walter K.



Claus Sendlinger on the building site of his latest project, Marina Marina at the Rummelsburger Bucht in Berlin, a creative campus for communal working, living, eating, and being. *FK* chair by Walter K.

# Claus Sendlinger

Design Hotels AG and SLOW Hospitality, Berlin

“With the *FK* chair, every point is defined. It just radiates a timeless power. And in this way every good design has its own energy, its own character.”

Read the interview with Claus Sendlinger on **PERSONALITY** on page 24

The EOOS design team  
Martin Bergmann,  
Gernot Bohmann and  
Harald Gründl (from left)  
in their studio in the  
First District of Vienna

Martin Bergmann  
Gernot Bohmann  
Harald Gründl

EOOS, Vienna

“At some point in the design process, the model strikes back: you make another change and it all gets worse. You can feel it. That’s the moment you know the design is perfect.”

Read the conversation with  
Gernot Bohmann and Martin Bergmann  
about **CREATIVITY** on page 25

## Mindfulness The CEO of KPMG Belgium explains what furniture has to do with respect, team spirit and management – and why his clients like to visit him at his office so much



Mr. Maerevoet, you just made a beeline for the 369 armchair by Walter K. Is that a coincidence?

Not at all. This chair is my favorite model. It is compact, flexible and very comfortable, and its high quality is a way of showing respect to guests and employees alike.

Why did you choose furniture by Walter K. for your new headquarters?

We moved into an unusual building – and wanted unusual furniture. Furniture that would emanate the core values of our work: innovation, stability and trust. And at Walter K. we found what we were looking for. The architecture and furniture are in perfect harmony with one another and with the values of KPMG.

There are various meeting rooms here on the tenth floor. Almost all the tables are round. Does that have anything to do with your values?

Although we're a big company, we're essentially a family and communicate as such. Once a month I invite a dozen employees to lunch so we can have an

open discussion. If we're all sitting together in a big group, that makes the meeting easier.

What does management mean to you?

To guide a group towards achieving a shared goal. To effectively communicate a vision and be able to develop a strategy based on that.

What matters more? Managing or letting the employees do their thing?

Good question. Our employees are highly qualified individuals who want to make their own decisions. That's why it's important to us to always strike the right balance between autonomy and structure. On the one hand, there are employees who want to make their own decisions and, on the other, the team that is pursuing a shared goal. At KPMG, the team is ultimately more important than the individual.

How have managing styles changed?

Expertise used to be the main reason for hiring someone. Back then, managers had a scrutinizing role. Today, they focus more on motivating employees. That's why we prioritize social skills when recruiting.

How has your managing style changed?

I do a lot more listening and communicating than I used to. My employees expect immediate feedback to their questions and suggestions. We are in constant contact with one another.

These days there is much debate about new work, agility and holacracy when it comes to leadership. How important are these things to you?

We talk about them. In my opinion, they are important prerequisites for good teamwork. And I see teamwork as the future. Decisions can be implemented

more quickly and efficiently when the members of a team are working together – far more so than when they are just following orders from the top.

Did you want to reflect the corporate culture in the furniture?

Absolutely. When picking furniture, you must first understand the corporate culture. Ours is characterized by friendliness, transparency and intimacy.

How does the furniture show that?

Ultimately, it's about quality and trust. And the furniture perfectly embodies those values: clear-cut shapes and great skill down to the last detail – those are also our brand values. I like to think about KPMG as a family-run business. Our tone of voice is less aggressive than at other companies – we try to motivate our employees. The furniture conveys the way our company treats people and the environment as well as the company's approach to the future. In other words, our furniture is a way of showing respect to our employees and clients. And, naturally, the furniture is a part of our branding strategy.

How do visitors respond to the interior?

Our clients are very impressed by the building and the furniture. Lately, a number of clients have started to prefer meeting in our office. Which is, of course, a great compliment. *Interview: Ilona Marx*

### About

Koen Maerevoet is CEO of KPMG Belgium. In 2016, the lawyer and tax expert became a Senior Partner at the company. Read more about the new KPMG headquarters starting on page 34.

## Quality When the Frankfurt-based real estate expert talks about her new office, it sounds like a wonderful ménage à trois. And the other protagonists are a table and chair by Walter K.



rooms, open spaces or community working spaces rather than individual offices. If a building can do all that, then its resale value goes up.

Interestingly enough, quality and flexibility are also key values for furniture design.

A building and its furnishings are complementary: one begets the other and vice versa. The better both work with one another, the higher the value.

Why did you decide on furniture by Walter K.?

When I started to look for a desk during the move, I saw a model that I could move up and down: the *Exec-V*. I unexpectedly fell in love. Minimal design with an ingenious function – this table is just delightful.

Do you ever move it up and down just for the fun of it?

At the beginning, yes! It's so incredibly quiet. And now I see that it's good for both my back and my brain when I alternate between sitting down and standing up while working. Now I even have a second *Exec-V* in my office in Paris.

How often, approximately, do you adjust the height of the table?

Every day! I write while I'm sitting and I like to stand while on conference calls or for short meetings. And the *Exec-V* is well suited for people to gather around.

How did your *Leadchair Executive* come into your life?

I wanted a chair with a high back rest that supported my head but was still elegant. And I wanted the seating depth to suit me down to the ground. Most executive chairs are simply too deep for your average woman – only taller women can sit comfortably in them. My interior designer recommended me the *Leadchair Executive* and I ordered it.

You didn't even try sitting in it first?

No. And it has been extremely comfortable since day one. For years I suffered from back and neck pains and now they have gotten significantly better. It feels like the *Leadchair Executive* was designed for the sole purpose of doing my body good.

That's what you meant when you said that spaces influence our quality of life.

Harmonious surroundings are incredibly important. It shouldn't be too perfect, but livable. When I walk into a room, I want to feel comfortable there.

What do you feel when you walk into your office?

I look forward to my furniture and my view every single morning. The two things together inspire me. *Interview: Ralf Grauel*

### About

Barbara Knoflach is Global Head of Investment Management at BNP Paribas Real Estate. In 2017, she received the Most Influential Woman of the Decade prize from the trade magazine PropertyEU in London. She is considered the most influential woman in the European real estate sector.

Ms. Knoflach, what matters more to you: furnishings or views?

(laughing) Spaces shape people, I'm convinced of that. So I believe that good furnishings matter most of all. They have an impact on our quality of life. And if you have a heavenly view like we do here from the thirty-third floor, well, that's an added bonus. Then again, I also like our lobby where you can see outside from almost anywhere – and there is lots of greenery. The entire building is massive and minimal at the same time. A mix of clear assertiveness and restraint.

It sounds like the building has a character. Is that what a property needs?

I am essentially an asset manager. If I invest my client's money in a property, I always consider three factors: quality, infrastructure and flexibility.

How do these factors increase the value of a building?

When you buy quality, you are sparing yourself future expenses. Which is to say: you buy cheap, you buy twice?

In most cases, yes. Quality can be seen above all in the workmanship and architecture. When I talk about infrastructure, I am talking about a building's proximity to public transportation or parking spaces for cars as well as bike stands. But that still isn't enough. The people who live or work in the building also want restaurants, bars and culture nearby; and if they get hungry, they should be able to go around the corner and buy a sandwich.

And flexibility?

Flexibility is becoming increasingly important because the needs of tenants are changing more dramatically and more rapidly than ever before. Companies no longer want to be bound to ten-year leases. And if they do, they want to be able to divide and sublet their spaces. Many users at some point will want flexible

## Brand What does an armchair say about a company?

### How does furniture inspire employees?

The media maker was intent on realizing his vision of the new Handelsblatt exclusively with Walter K.



Mr. Dopheide, what kind of furniture do you have in your office?

FD I don't have an office – that is part of the cultural change that we are going through. Publishing houses are hierarchical, making it very difficult for the management to gain a sense of the mood among the employees and within the various departments. That is why, day in day out, I find a place for myself among my colleagues. But from eight till nine in the morning, I sit downstairs in the foyer.

You work in the foyer?

FD I read our newspapers and the expressions on my colleagues' faces – to see their frame of mind as they come to work. Everyone knows and sees that I am approachable. Some might hesitate a few days, but they always come to see me. Sometimes it's about a difficult customer, other times it's to do with the office dog. Many things are too small to require a formal appointment with the management but can nevertheless place a strain on day-to-day office life, so we quickly find a solution.

Do you already have a favorite item among the range of new office furniture?

FD My favorite is the *FK Lounge* armchair.

It's a prestigious item that embodies ultimate relaxation. I enjoy sitting on our FKs with customers in the entrance hall. If people are as enthusiastic about the Handelsblatt as they are about these armchairs, then I'll be a happy man.

What will the Handelsblatt of the future look like?

FD We are shifting from a distinguished business paper to an innovative media group. We want to share economic expertise with society as a whole – be it in printed, digital or live format. Our newspaper is 73 years old, people love our experience, our analytical skills. That is great, but we cannot allow ourselves to be stifled by sobriety. That is why we must bring the old forward into the future.

How are you addressing this transformation?

FD Our new building is a cornerstone of the process. We wanted a flagship store. As our products become increasingly virtual, it helps to have a place where employees, readers and customers come into physical contact with the strength of our brand. The rooms and furniture must make our brand and our values both visible and tangible.

What do you feel now when you touch your furniture?

FD Excellence, independence, clarity, community and innovation. Excellence is fundamental – our desks, upholstered benches and sofas make that abundantly clear. Every employee feels that the desire for excellence also applies to them. Every visitor, regardless of whether they are a customer or a job applicant, should see us as a future-oriented company.

Does that mean job applicants choose their employer from the inside?

FD It is mind-boggling how much time we

spend at the office during our life. And this space has an influence on our decisions. If you don't care about the furniture, the technical equipment or the quality of the coffee machine, that shows your indifference. That is why we gave a lot of thought, and devotion, to the equipment in our new building.

Why did you opt for Walter K.?

FD The company suits us to a T – like us, Walter K. stands for excellent products. And astounding experience. Markus Benz and his team displayed the utmost empathy and creativity.

How did you brief Walter K.?

FD We handed them our brand strategy and then worked together to determine which values were to be conveyed and which area played which communicative and emotional role. It was sometimes something of a struggle, but the result is perceptible and quite exceptional.

What do your visitors think?

FD They say that they want to stay and work here. They praise the concentrated power and the pleasant atmosphere. The employees' perspective has also changed noticeably. They now tend to see us as being much more flexible and modern. It is important to remember that many of our employees are journalists, a highly critical breed if ever there was one. Praise from them is the ultimate accolade. *Interview: Hiltrud Bontrup*

#### About

Frank Dopheide has held the position of Managing Director, responsible for customer development and brand management, at the Handelsblatt Media Group since 2014. Previously he was Chairman at the advertising agency Scholz & Friends in Düsseldorf and at Grey Worldwide, and founded the agency Deutsche Markenarbeit.

**Naturalness** We are always drawn to the same things: fire, earth, water, air. The Tokyo-based creative director is a master of the four classical elements. A portrait



of an agency and graphic designer, he never gets tired of sitting at the drawing board. But above all, he likes to discover through dialog what a company needs and how it sees itself. "A pharmaceutical company wants to restore health, i.e., promote vitality. That's why I chose vitality as the basis for the entire concept." The source of vitality is found in nature, as is the source of medicine. It therefore seemed obvious to use natural materials, especially wood.

"In design, there is always the question of how much to preserve and how much to change," says Kashiwa Sato, while turning a handleless Japanese ceramic cup over in his hand pensively. In every artefact there is a basic function, an archaic form that must always stay the same. "People are the same all over in the world. As living beings, we function according to a basic biological rhythm. We have the same taste in music, colors and smells. There is something archaic that connects us all." Walter K. also works with time-honored, tried-and-tested design principles. Staff there take archetypes very seriously.

"And when new developments come along, they masterfully go about finding a balance."

His guiding principle: someone who wants to create something eccentric while disregarding the archetypes is bound to fail. "A concept must not stray too far from the known path, otherwise people feel overwhelmed and it is immediately rejected." If just ten percent of an object is new – that is already very good. "It's enough to provide that small stimulus. Like a muscle," says Sato and pinches his upper arm. "Without any stimulus it cannot grow either."

Kashiwa Sato created inspiring stimuli at Pharma Inc. in the form of eight Japanese characters, which stand for different areas of the building. Stylized in the form of kumiki, the traditional three-dimensional wood art, they adorn walls and lights. That is how a simple and remarkably effective design was produced. Clear and warm thanks to the light Japanese cypress wood and soft lighting. Valuable thanks to lovingly executed Japanese craftsmanship. Reduction, innovation and quality in perfect balance: "That's how minimalist design works," says Kashiwa Sato. And how it eventually becomes a source of power. *Sonja Blaschke*

Kashiwa Sato likes to keep it simple – just as long as it's not boring. The designer sits in the conference room of his agency, Samurai Inc., in Tokyo, in the middle of a long table made of fine, light-colored wood. The table is so wide that people sitting opposite one another can barely reach each other's hands. Apart from that, the room – framed by sliding glass walls – is empty. No pictures, no objects, nothing that could be a distraction. "Whoever comes in here should focus on the discussion," says Sato and smiles mischievously.

The 53 year old Tokyoite, dressed in a dark T-shirt and light pants, is one of the best known Japanese creative directors. Global companies such as the clothes designer Uniqlo, the car manufacturer Honda and the fashion label Issey Miyake treasure his talent for omission. When working on flagship stores and corporate headquarters, he boils down the design so dramatically that only the essence of the brand can shine through – and be understood the world over. "By leaving things out, priorities become clearer," says Kashiwa Sato, pushing aside imaginary weight with his hands for emphasis. "What remains is stronger and lasts longer."

He has just designed the new headquarters of the pharmaceutical company Pharma Inc. in Tokyo – with chairs, armchairs and sofas by Walter K. He found a kindred spirit in the furniture maker 9,000 kilometers away in Herrenberg: "Walter K. has managed to tread the fine line between linearity and finesse perfectly," says Kashiwa Sato. When, like him, your core principle is minimalism, you need high-quality furniture that makes an impact in a room and pleases the senses with its perfection.

"What's important to you?" – This is Kashiwa Sato's favorite question to ask his clients face-to-face. After twenty years as head

#### About

Kashiwa Sato is one of the most sought-after creative directors in Japan. He shapes the brand identity of his clients from logos to company buildings. In addition, he teaches at various universities and writes books, such as the bestseller *Kashiwa Sato's Ultimate Method of Reaching the Essentials*. He has been running his agency, Samurai Inc., in Tokyo, since the year 2000.

\*The company wishes to remain anonymous, so we have changed the name. Read more about the new headquarters starting on page 50.

# Claus Sendlinger

Design Hotels AG, SLOW Hospitality

**Personality** Buildings with a special vibe. Employees with minds of their own. Accidents that become opportunities. Whenever this hotelier launches a project, something quite unique is created



cs It's working like a charm.

Will you be founding more farms like this?

cs Definitely not. The era of global franchises is over. A good product can't be multiplied endlessly. Otherwise it can't become a classic, a legend. This leather chair, *FK*, by Walter K., the chair I'm sitting on now, is a classic. Every point is defined. It radiates a timeless power. And every good design has its own energy like this.

This all sounds very spiritual.

cs The trend forecaster Li Edelkoort says that in the next five years, we're all going to be yearning for spirituality and indigenous craft products. And for wabi-sabi. Which comes from Zen Buddhism, and means the beauty of imperfection, transience. Everything changes, and the beauty is in the ageing.

Workers at Walter K. also talk about imperfection in perfection. They work with natural materials, leather, wool, wood. They take the natural variations of those materials into account ...

Mr. Sendlinger, what is more important: personality or price?

cs Personality. The world is already gray enough.

Twenty-five years ago, you founded Design Hotels, a portal for select hotels. In 2011, you started your own project. Was that because you wanted to do yourself what you'd been encouraging others to do?

cs Exactly. It started with the Papaya Playa Project in Tulum, Mexico, beach huts for the digital community. We're particularly proud of our most recent project, the La Granja organic farm on Ibiza.

How important is personality in projects like this?

cs It's essential – just like it is anywhere else. If you want to stand out, you need character. We only find twenty cool hoteliers for our portfolio in a year. They're often career jumpers, but they know their way around music and art and the place where they live. Ideally, they're already doing good things in their current field – exhibitions, DJ sessions. The important thing is the user experience of our guests.

You're now moving away from Design Hotels and developing something new, the Marina Marina in Berlin. It has a... what do you call it?

cs A ritual space.

Aren't you afraid that's going to be too weird?

cs Rituals are exactly what people today lack.

How can you prevent yourself from losing contact with reality out of sheer originality – becoming untethered from the base?

cs The people who meet on the farm are exactly the people we want to reach. They're all working with sustainability, they want to work the land together, cook, eat, meditate together. We're doing all this entirely without social media. If you want to book, you write an email. Mystery of mysteries.

Is it working?

cs ... and so they play with the quirks instead of cutting them out.

How do you think products with character are made?

cs I think you have to understand that every object basically has only one fundamental function to fulfill. A chair is a chair. A hotel is a hotel. So that's your foundation, and then on top of that there's a kind of play, with undefined spaces, niches, positions, horizons, and so on, to be explored and defined.

How do you find the right people to involve in your projects?

cs By accident and through friends. The team on the farm has just surprised me with a new chef. This guy had completely redesigned the whole kitchen. Great haircut, the right sneakers – he looked fantastic. Then he cooked for us: panzerotti, ceviche and a lamb that was brought in on a gigantic wooden tray. And I'm asking, who is this guy? (laughs) He used to be a waiter. Came from South America, and in his first year with us he got us three people from Francis Mallmann's kitchen in Uruguay.

I'm afraid I don't know anything about Mallmann.

cs He's from Patagonia, and he won the Grand Prix de l'Art de la Cuisine one time, in Kronberg – with potatoes. Because he wasn't allowed to import them into Germany from Argentina, he smuggled them in. Thirty varieties. Weighing one tonne.

He won the gastronomic Oscars with potatoes?

cs Nine courses of potatoes! That's personality. *Interview: Ralf Grauel*

## About

Claus Sendlinger is one of the most innovative entrepreneurs in the international hotel business. Design Hotels AG, which he founded, lists over 300 hotels in its portfolio. Together with Peter Conrads, he now heads the SLOW Hospitality ("sensitive, local, organic, wise") creative laboratory, based in Berlin, with the aim of creating unique places around the world and reinventing gastronomy and the hotel industry.

# Gernot Bohmann

EOOS

# Martin Bergmann

**Creativity** How are classics made? Can you force inspiration? How do the designers at EOOS manage to design timeless furniture for Walter K. time and time again?



The result is more of a sculpture than a piece of furniture.

mb We were thinking: If only we could sit at a table that was more of a sculpture. One that gently wrapped around the curve of my belly which, after all, is a vulnerable part of my body.

Where do you picture this sculpture?

mb In a place where a person sits and thinks and writes and works on a vision. In a stately mansion or in the office of a person who moves effortlessly through the world of art and culture.

How do you know when a design is finished?

mb At some point, the model strikes back: you make another change and it all gets worse. You can feel it. That's the moment you know the design is perfect.

gb We try to take all design-related factors into account during the design process – from the aesthetic, functionality and material consumption of a product to its serial production options and manufacturing costs.

mb Design is a 380-degree process.

Why 380 degrees? Aren't 360 enough?

mb Those 20 extra degrees are necessary poetry.

Are you able to say in the end which of you had the pivotal idea?

mb No. I might see Gernot's three-hundredth sketch of a chair – maybe the wrong way round – comment on it, and the next day he'll have built a new model and found a new path. We'll work on a model for months – arguing about and changing things – and get into a flow where it doesn't matter who has what idea.

What sort of input do you get when you go to Walter K.?

mb An enormous input. We are a

three-headed team, but we do need an outsider's perspective. When Markus Benz sat down at the first *Tama Desk* prototype, he said: I'm sitting too far to the left, by about 15 centimeters. We wouldn't have realized that on our own. Now the person sits in the center of the desk.

gb That's what makes Walter K. special. Jürgen Röhm and the others in the development department are a group of pros, specialists and artists who we can talk to about each individual seam and who help us come up with ideas when we get stuck.

mb Another key factor: the people there always make sure we're well fed; they're very reflective and have a sense of humor. Otherwise it wouldn't be tolerable.

What makes your work stressful?

gb When the material resources, construction or price don't match up; when a project turns out to be garbage in the end. That's frustrating.

And what helps you get back up again?

gb When Markus Benz gives us the green light and the entire company stands behind one vision.

mb When I hear his almost archaic "Yes" in response to one of our designs – it still moves me. *Interview: Carsten Jasner*

## The Team

Gernot Bohmann (left) and Martin Bergmann studied in the master class of design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. With their classmate Harald Gründl, they co-founded the EOOS design agency. Their designs have been significantly shaping Walter K.'s catalogue for over twenty years.

Mr. Bergmann, Mr. Bohmann, how do you create timeless design?

gb No idea.

mb That's not how we think about it. We don't sit down at a table and say: "All right, now we're going to make a classic." So what is your approach?

mb We listen. We go to Herrenberg and talk with Markus Benz once a month. When he tells us about how he sees the market, about ideas and visions, I start to see shapes in my mind.

gb You see shapes? Remarkable.

For me, something starts to light up. A feeling of mutual understanding that inspires me.

mb Something lights up for you? That's also pretty remarkable.

Most recently you designed the *Tama Desk* for Walter K. How did it come into being?

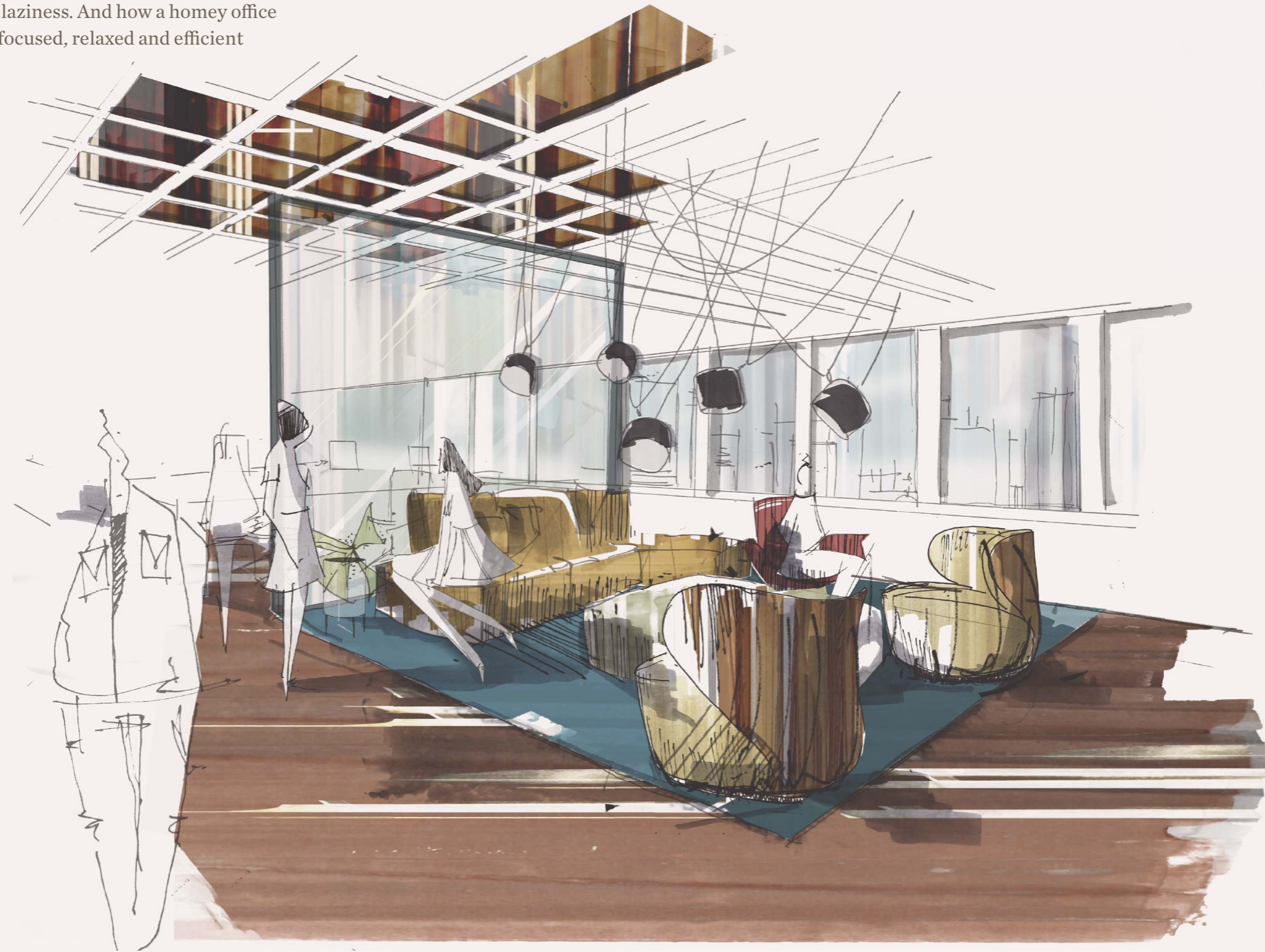
mb We turned the usual design process on its head.

gb Instead of drawing a sketch, we took some cardboard and cut out organic shapes with a pair of scissors. Very quickly. Because the process was meant to channel our intuition.

# The sofa revolution

By Ilona Marx and Ralf Grauel

Why the sudden appearance of upholstered furniture in our offices does not equate to laziness. And how a homey office environment makes us more focused, relaxed and efficient



Emotion and encounter: between a conference and working on the computer, we need some comfy zones

Are you familiar with Kastrup, Copenhagen's airport? Large, round lampshades diffuse soft, warm light. Dark parquet flooring, upholstered seats and couches – classic Danish design that exudes comfort. Kastrup, one of the coziest airports in the world, was made that bit cozier in December 2017: in Terminal 2, the Atelier Relaxium was opened, with upholstered furniture, carpets and luminous objects in all the colors of the rainbow. Just a stone's throw away is an inviting sofa landscape, the color scheme of which evokes a sunset above the clouds. Amid this absolute bliss, passengers here run the risk of missing their connecting flight.

“Hygge” is the word the Danes and Norwegians use to describe the feeling of the world hugging you; of being both snug and inspired at the same time. This Nordic variant of coziness is a mixture of ambiance and feeling; hygge is homemade happiness. With family, friends and loved ones we feel good all around.

Hygge is now the theme of attractive coffee-table books, colorful brochures, weblogs and magazines. The meteoric rise of this small, soothing word to one of last year's global trending terms is evidence of a universal yearning for deceleration. The more digitalized our work and daily lives become, the more important organic oases become. Last year, a meditation app of all things became one of the most successful apps. The pursuit of relaxation is one of the core trends counter-acting digitalization. We long for tradition, vintage and coziness. That is why we are now seeing sofas and comfort zones in places that often cause a lot of stress. And so, with the advent of upholstered airports, the development that had for a long time been an inextricable feature of hotels, lounges, public areas and offices has reached a whole new level.

Cynics might soon be justified in lamenting the cushification of the world. But, actually, what we're seeing here is the spread of a vital synthesis; because, amid the multitude of acceleration and gear changes in our daily and professional lives, the simple fact is that we need places where we can restore our inner balance and relax. In the rooms where ping pong and foosball tables were once eyed with suspicion years ago in start-up offices, there now stand sofas, armchairs, reading lights and coffee tables today. And that is how

it should be. Because this new variety of coziness is not a means for distraction or shirking work. Quite the opposite: office workers are creating places for concentration, communication and encounters. Afterwards, it's back to the computer screens, where they click their way through open windows, emails, presentations and tables.

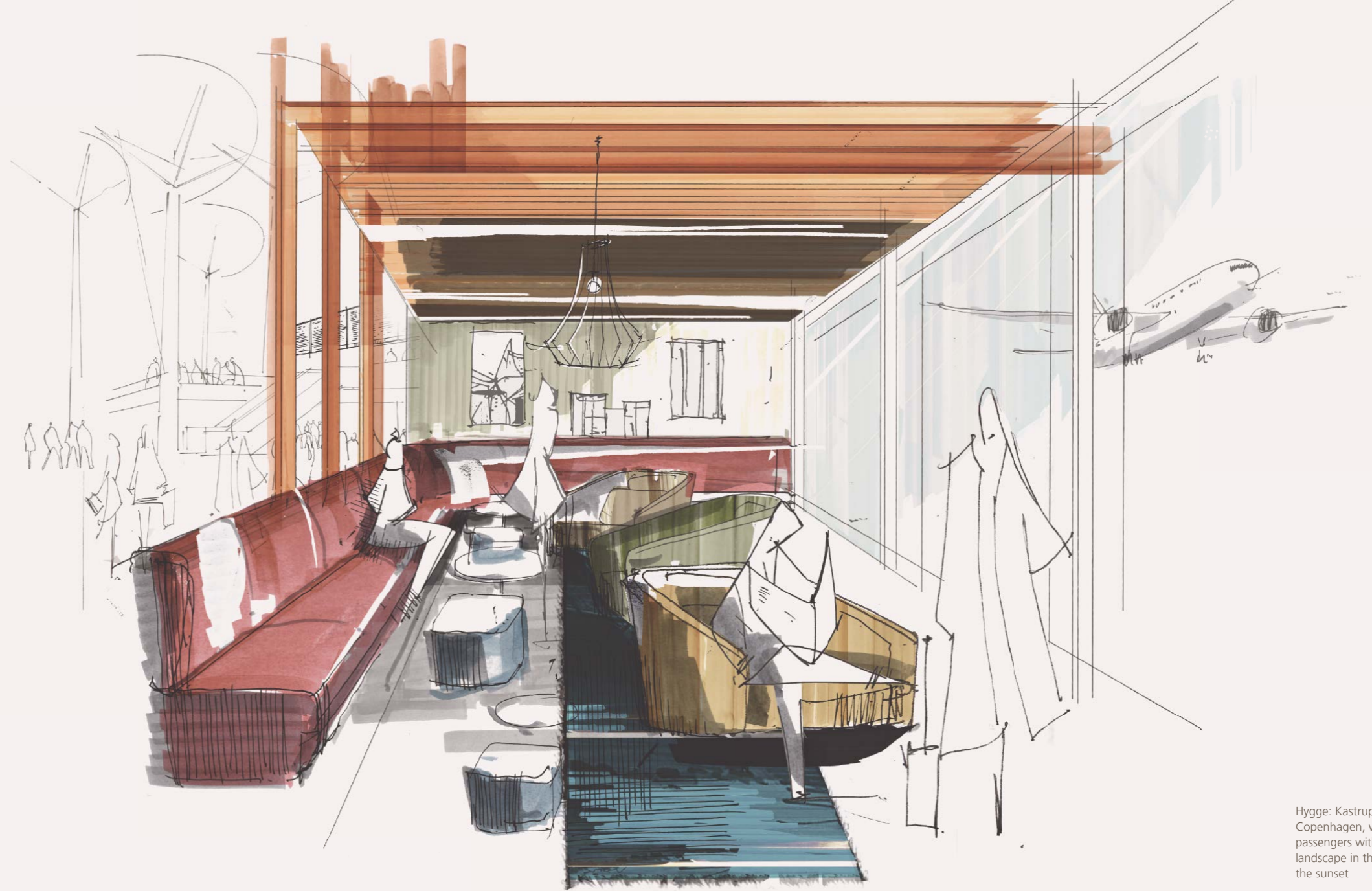
While during the new economy era the creative chaos of start-up interiors conjured up images of colorful hamster labyrinths, today, calm has finally set in. People and work come together in flexible work-spaces, between sofas, multifunctional tables and areas that can be altered at will. In well-designed offices,

the mood is the same as the concentrated atmosphere in a factory.

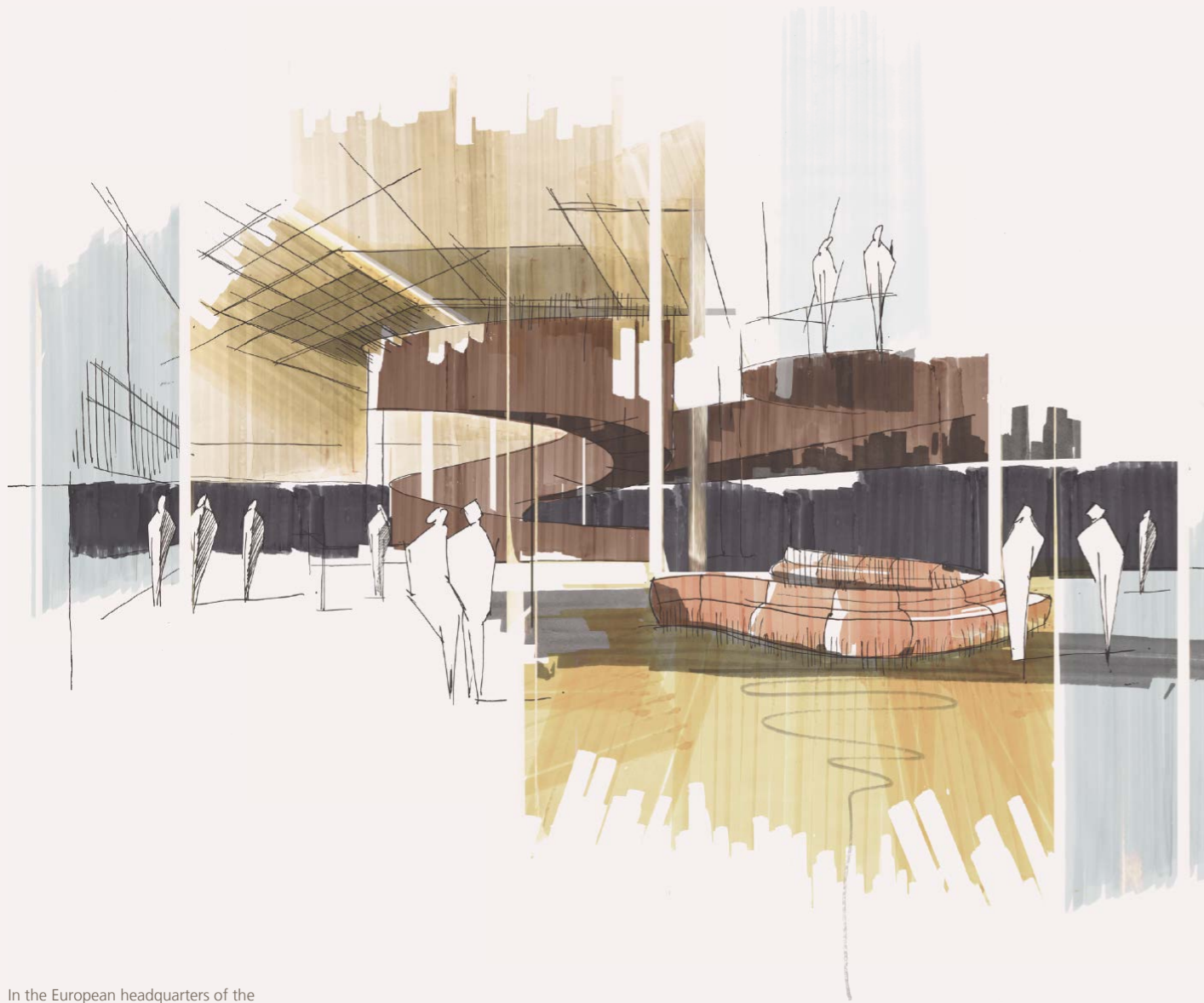
This was precisely the mood the Handelsblatt publishing group was going for when they set to furnishing their new editorial offices together with Walter K. The transformation from a classic daily newspaper to an agile media company is in full swing. The new interior design had to be more flexible, and the furniture and materials absolutely had to reflect the media company's high standards of quality, management and excellence. The newspaper's new rooms combine open space with silent rooms, collaboration with concentration, communication with

discretion. This breathing structure landed the media company in the new world of New Work – it's no wonder the curvy, colorful sofa landscape *Circle* by Walter K. now forms the fulcrum of the office floor.

However, the office sofa is more than just the new foosball table. Taking a little time out and briefly stopping and sitting for a conversation are part of the new creative process – just like the latte macchiato is part of the morning ritual. For a long time now, laptops and smartphones have blurred the boundaries between work and free time. We occasionally like to work from home and, conversely, want to see homey features at work. And so, like an echo, in the era of the



Hygge: Kastrup Airport, Copenhagen, welcomes passengers with a sofa landscape in the colors of the sunset



In the European headquarters of the Bloomberg media group in London, the upholstered bench *Foster 620* by Walter K. structures the open space. It was designed – as was the entire building – by architect Norman Foster

home office, elements from home resonate in the office.

Of course, more than just furniture spills over – this also happens with all other tones and topics of a new era: culture and etiquette, democracy, communication at eye level, diversity and welfare. Spending all day and all night in the office has no place in the life model of Generation Y. YOLO (“you only live once”) is not the dictum of the digital natives for nothing. Nowadays, everything must fit – work to live and live to work. The office sofa has become a symbol of mindfulness, appreciation and authenticity.

### New Work is me time and we time

At the same time, the upholstered comfort zones create points of contact in the truest sense of the word. In the 1980s, the future still looked bright, and progress was wrapped in plastic and held by a chrome-plated steel tube. But now, because digitalization is changing our lives and it can only be grasped in the form of a smooth screen, we need analog experiences: nature, material, haptics, substantiality. Satisfying the elementary needs of body and soul could become the luxury of the twenty-first century.

However, above all, comfort zones are a spatial representation of the change in work and organization. They give structure to everything that New Work stands for today. Agility, flexibility and diversity are direct responses to acceleration, digitalization and globalization. Projects, teams, targets and processes are so diverse nowadays because the markets are, too. And all these new aspects also mean that we can very rarely fulfill our multifaceted tasks sitting on our posterior all day in the same place.

Sometimes, it requires careful concentration at a computer and other times a relaxed conversation

with coworkers, and then sometimes a highly confidential three-way meeting. This can be stressful and can even easily lead to misunderstandings. That is precisely why zones are needed. For relaxation and exchange. For concentration and communication. In this way, office life is normalized into a mixture of me time, we time, sometimes work bench, sometimes marketplace.

As such, for a long time now, high potentials have been assessing a company’s strategy for the future not only based on its furniture but also on its floor plan. The architectural firm Foster + Partners, which already refers to itself as a “workplace consultancy,” has just developed the spectacular European headquarters of the Bloomberg Media Group. Founder Michael Bloomberg has always been an advocate of an open-plan office layout. And so, after years of research, Lord Foster and his colleagues have successfully eliminated footstep sounds and ambient noises to create a virtually limitless open-plan quiet zone. Vast quantities of wood and stone, ten open, curved floors, giant fish tanks, snack bars, and – running in long, flowing curves – upholstered furniture designed by Norman Foster and made by Walter K., create a stimulating and, and at the same time, extraordinarily homey ambiance.

And did Jeff Bezos – Bloomberg’s compatriot who is also lauded as a visionary – not just buy 40,000 plants to create a jungle paradise for his staff in Seattle? The signs are clear: the number of office oases will increase. You could even say that work is becoming hygge. The coziness factor is therefore expected to continue on its upward course. But don’t think that it will make things more boring. At the end of the day, outside our offices, lounges and comfort zones, the world is still out there. And it continues to spin at break-neck speed. As do our jobs.

### Written by

Ilona Marx is a journalist and writes on the interface between the economy and society for the publications brand eins, Lufthansa Exclusive, Edison/Handelsblatt, AW Architektur & Wohnen, The Weekender, Wallpaper, Focus Style and Port Magazine. Previously, she was editor-in-chief of the fashion magazine J’N’C for twenty years.

Ralf Grauel is a business journalist, publicist and consultant. He worked as editor and author for brand eins and brand eins Wissen for ten years. With his agency Grauel Publishing, he develops books, magazines and digital platforms. His clients include bulthaup, Leica, Wempe – and Walter K.



# Brands

Brands guarantee performance, provide direction and make promises. The more digital our world, lives and work become, the more important become places that inspire trust and give back something very real. Places that give us comfort or respect, for example. Walter K. are masters of the art of expressing brands in furniture – be it in Los Angeles, Brussels, Munich or Tokyo

# A part of the family

KPMG Belgium, Brussels

A strong character, but soft around the edges – the furniture in the new headquarters of KPMG Belgium immediately shows visitors what they can expect: reliability, warmth, stability



A visitor magnet. In the vastness of the room, in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows, the furniture delivers its iconic impact: characterful shapes, fine textures, inviting upholstery. *369 and Bao* armchairs, *Jaan Living* sofa, *Joco and Joco Stone* side tables, all by Walter K.

## Living in the office

Home furniture transforms the office into a place where you can feel good. Splashes of color, soft textures, armchairs and sofas in appealing shapes take the edge off linear architecture. The result is a harmonious whole.



The conference area and lounge flow into one another, and the sweeping curves bring it all together: *Bao* and *369* armchairs, *Jaan* sofa, *Oki Table*, *Keypiece* conference table, *Kyo* chairs, all by Walter K.

A plane takes off from Brussels Airport without a sound. Koen Maerevoet turns to look. From time to time, the CEO of KPMG Belgium treats himself to the show that unfurls before him through the panoramic windows of the company's new headquarters. Up here, on the tenth and highest floor of the building, is the auditing firm's visitors' floor and Maerevoet's favorite place – furnished with a stylish seating area by Walter K. It consists of the olive-green leather *Jaan* sofa, two yellow *369* chairs and two yellow *Bao* chairs. Against the dark gray carpet and brown-paneled wall, the colors can reveal their true resplendence. In the center of the ensemble, the *Oki Table* – a low marble table of generous proportions on a delicate metal frame – appears to hover in mid-air.

In May 2018, KPMG Belgium moved into its new headquarters next to Brussels Airport. The lease on the old premises had expired, so they seized the opportunity to move closer to the airport. Auditors, tax specialists, management consultants and legal experts can now conveniently see their clients fly in. Just a few minutes' walk from the terminal, they greet

their visitors at the elegant *Keypiece* conference table made of dark wood and ask them to take a seat. Twenty bucket seats *Kyo* with leather upholstery in a warm grayish brown are grouped around the table, which is as spacious as it is inviting – the corners are rounded and there is not a sharp edge in sight. All the furniture in these rooms exudes warmth and trustworthiness.

During conferences, both the employees' and clients' gaze will occasionally follow the trajectory of inaudible take-offs and landings; some contemplate the striking control tower. A concentrated silence pervades the room – the sound insulation meets the highest



*“Since we moved here, our clients vastly prefer to come to us for meetings.”*

KOEN MAEREVOET CEO, KPMG Belgium

standards. It is an ideal location for conducting important discussions and making big decisions. “Since we moved here,” says Koen Maerevoet with a smile, “our clients vastly prefer to come to us for meetings.”

Friendliness, solidarity, constancy – these are the values of KPMG, whose roots reach back to 1870. The company ethos has parallels with that of Walter K. It is reflected both on the upper and the lower floors, where office spaces abound with unique pieces by Walter K. The desire to reinvent familiarity can be felt everywhere in the light-flooded new building. Open spaces without a fixed seating arrangement, small



rooms for secluded work and plenty of space for encounters and communication. “The new office is truly luxurious. In a hotel, you would call it a two-star upgrade,” says Christine Reinders, Marketing and Brand Manager at KPMG, with regard to her revamped workplace. Maerevoet gives a satisfied nod. He likes to think of KPMG as a container ship that needs time for larger maneuvers. Here in Brussels, a course has been set for the future.

Ilona Marx

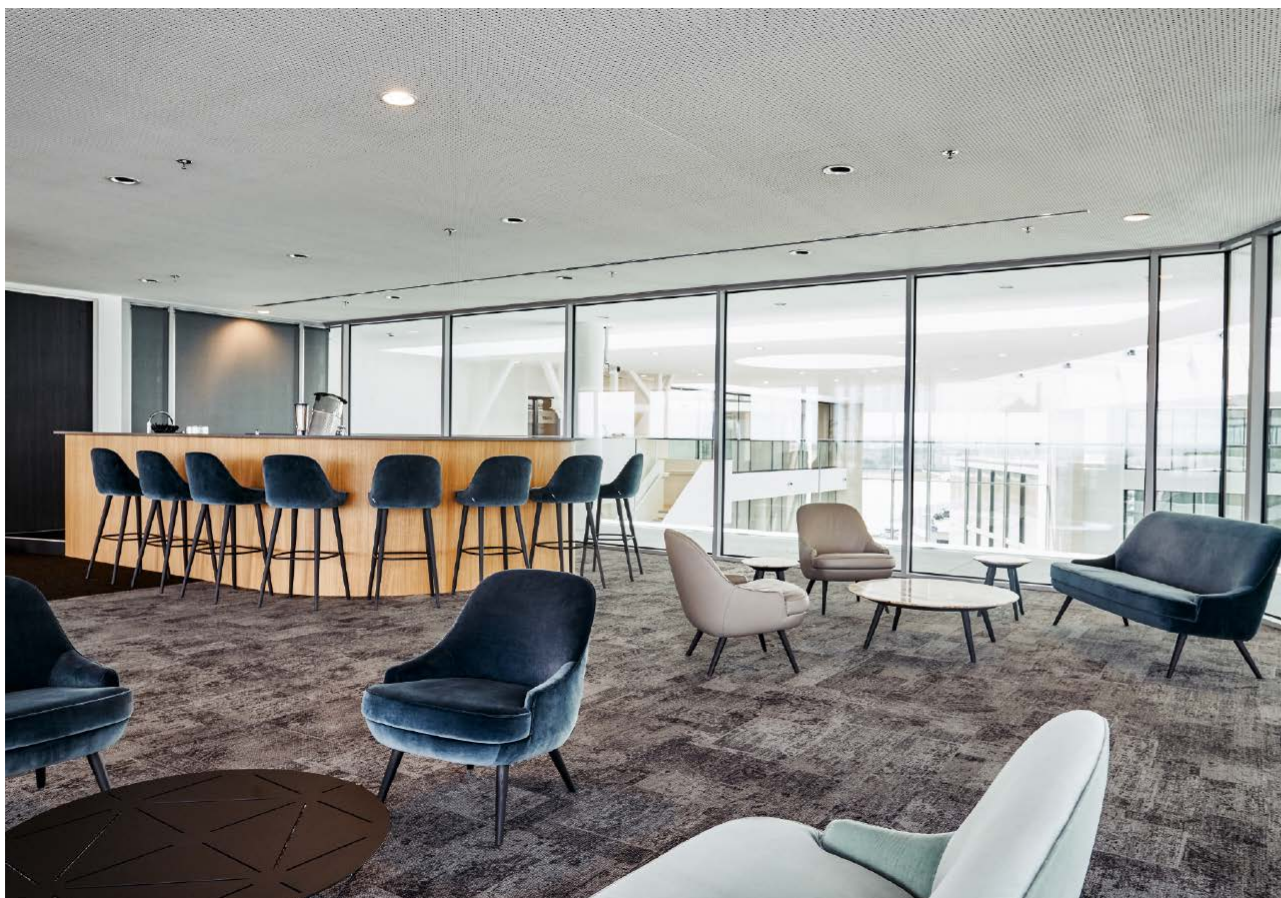


“The furniture by Walter K. is classic with a modern touch. It conveys a sense of sophistication that is even noticed by visitors who don’t work in interior design.”

**KAREL TANGHE**

Partner, Head of Audit, KPMG Belgium

Left: With its boat shape and vibrant solid-wood top, the *Keypiece* conference table embodies the familial identity of KPMG Belgium. Modern devices can be discretely connected to the media wall via connectors in the table top. Chairs: *Kyo*. Armchairs, sofas, barstools and occasional tables from the 375 range bring the lounge bar to life. The design was created in the 1950s. *Joco* occasional table.  
Bottom: Shapes and colors in harmony. *Jaan Bench*, 369 armchair and *Joco* occasional table. All furniture by Walter K.



#### PROJECT

KPMG Belgium, Brussels Office, Belgium

#### COMPLETED

Spring 2018

#### ARCHITECTURE

Jaspers-Eyers Architects, Brussels, Belgium

#### INTERIOR

Alternativ Workspace Solutions, Brussels, Belgium

#### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

369, 375, Bao, Jaan, Jaan Bench, Jaan Living, Joco, Joco Stone, Keypiece, Kyo, Oki Table, Oota Table, Seito, Tadeo, Tobu

#### LOCATION

Visitors' room, office, conference room, lobby, lounge

#### PHOTOS

Benne Ochs, Hamburg, Germany

KPMG is an international cooperative of independent auditing and consultancy firms. In 2017, it had a total of around 200,000 staff members at locations in 154 countries.

Combining the comfortable with the beautiful: employees love to meet in the Sky Lounge where they can brainstorm while sitting on Bao chairs by Walter K.

L'Oréal Germany, Dusseldorf

# New Work? New look!

At cosmetics giant L'Oréal, everything revolves around beauty – and speed is of the essence. At the new company headquarters in Dusseldorf, employees can always find the right place to get their creative juices flowing when inspiration strikes



The play of curves and verticals: the *Foster 512* upholstered benches by Walter K. shape the lobby space of L'Oréal Germany's new headquarters

New shades every season, hundreds of patents every year, a global market with different target groups: the world of cosmetics is colorful, competitive and changing all the time. Those who want to keep up or be the driver of change must be agile and quick. Inventive and alert. L'Oréal, the largest cosmetics manufacturer in the world, has moved into its new German headquarters in Dusseldorf. Ease and mobility naturally become a part of the working style here.

On the northern edge of the city, in the sixteen-story J1 building, huge spaces have emerged. The floor-to-ceiling windows merge with open spaces dotted with clusters of desks; in the middle, there are cozy meeting areas with armchairs and stools; next to that are closed-off think tanks for team brainstorming sessions and discrete places for quiet time. In total, there are 950 workspaces for the employees and almost 900 alternative workspaces where they can perform their diverse tasks. And yet, there is not a single individ-

ual office. "Not even our boss has one," says Sascha Gormanns, head of Campus Management and part of the team that developed the new office.

Everyone – employees and visitors alike – enjoys riding the elevator to the fifteenth floor and taking in the stunning view from the Sky Lounge. Sascha Gormanns also likes to hold meetings there. "In the past, there was always one employee behind his desk and another in front of it – I always felt uncomfortable," he says. "Today, we meet at the armchairs." His favorite one is *Bao* by Walter K. "It's cushy and, in my opinion, incredibly comfortable. Everyone takes to it right away."

People at L'Oréal like to work at rotating workspaces. In the beginning, there were reservations about the new concept. But once the company moved in, everything fell into place. These sorts of ideas just have to be executed properly. Flexibility requires spaces for solitude and interiors that emanate respect

while fostering concentration, communication and creativity. With enough space for chance encounters of all kinds, as it is often out of these that new things are born. The employees co-determined the design of the new office. They established work groups, conducted surveys. The furniture by Walter K. had a lot of fans, and even people's different requests – modern or mid-century style? – could be granted. Both work; both go together.

Insofar as it was possible, the employees also worked flexibly in the old building. It was normal to leave the room to take a call, to have meetings at a restaurant – the desire to switch locations was there early on. Today, the employees intuitively choose from a wide spectrum of spaces and areas, from the coffee point to the phone booth. Staking out territories or blocking spaces by reserving them in advance – those things are simply not possible. Nor are they necessary, since there is space for everyone and everything.

Hiltrud Bontrup



The academy lounge, designed by engels architektur, has ample space for breaks. *Turtle* barstools by Walter K.



*"We have been using furniture by Walter K. for a long time. At first it was classic office furniture: high-quality desks that still look brand new after 25 years. Now we've selected a lot of cozy furniture for meeting areas and areas where we welcome our guests."*

**SASCHA GORMANNS**  
Head of Campus Management, L'Oréal Germany

#### PROJECT

L'Oréal Germany, Dusseldorf, Germany

#### COMPLETED

November 2017

#### ARCHITECTURE

HPP Architekten, Dusseldorf, Germany

#### INTERIOR

Mertens, Willich, Germany  
engels architektur, Meerbusch, Germany

#### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

*Bao*, *Conference-X*, *Cuoio Lounge*, *Jason Barstool*, *Joco*, *Keypiece*, *Liz*, *Lox Barstool*, *Foster 512*, *Turtle Barstool*

#### LOCATION

Lobby, lounge, conference room, kitchen

#### PHOTOS

Andrea Dingeldein, Cologne, Germany  
Rainer Rehfeld, Dusseldorf, Germany

The French company L'Oréal has been creating beauty products for more than a hundred years. Thanks to its innovative power and agility, it has become the biggest cosmetics manufacturer in the world. In 1930, the company first opened an office in Berlin and later in Dusseldorf. Today, it employs more than 2,000 people throughout Germany.

Thomas Mann House, Los Angeles

Once upon a time, the house was the refuge of an exceptional writer. Now the Californian villa is a place for German intellectuals, artists and researchers to write, debate and feel at home

# Pacific bliss





*“The struggle for democracy and for a free and open society is what will continue to unite us, the United States and Germany. That is why we acquired this house. And that is why we have made it so beautiful, comfortable and inviting.”*

**FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER** Federal President,  
at the opening of the Thomas Mann House in June 2018

**A** German cultural institute, not a museum.” The brief was clear. The Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles was not to be turned into a memorial site where literary pilgrims could ceremoniously shuffle around Thomas Mann’s desk. “Just the opposite,” says Ursula Seeba-Hannan. “Fellows will be living and working here for months, inviting guests over and engaging them in debate. The fellows are meant to feel at home – that’s why everything looks so natural.”

Managing partner at LenzWerk Holding in Berlin, Ursula Seeba-Hannan redesigned Thomas Mann’s American villa as a place for experiencing German culture. The writer had built the house for himself and his family in the early 1940s as a place of refuge during the Nazi era. In 1952, the Manns returned to Europe and the house was sold, rented, renovated. When it was back on the market in 2016, the Federal Foreign Office of Germany seized the opportunity, which turned out to be a double blessing. First, because the villa, designed by architect Julius Ralph Davidson, was spared from demolition. And second, because the German government secured a new place for German-American encounters.

Researchers, artists and intellectuals will now be able to fill the house with their democratic spirit.

Thomas Mann would have appreciated it. The *Buddenbrooks* author went into exile in 1933. After years of wandering from place to place, he and his family finally settled down in the house in Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles. While there, he wrote his *Deutsche Hörer* radio speeches in which he called for resistance against the Nazis. He also invited other exiles such as Theodor W. Adorno and Bertolt Brecht to his home.

A well-designed house is liberating. It provides shelter from the outside world and creates an indoor space for thinking and talking freely. Because everything says: “You are welcome here and may stay as long as you wish.” Because the furniture is made for people to use for decades, not for the sake of vanity. Because furniture can instill trust and provide a sense of stability.

“We picked the furniture for the Thomas Mann house as though it had always been there,” says Seeba-Hannan. The Mann family did not serve as the stylistic model for the house’s interior decoration. Back then, the family had brought their massive, ornate furniture from Germany to the villa. The current designer’s idea was to bring in furniture from German manufacturers again, but this time use furniture that better fit the style of the house and the present.

Seeba-Hannan knew immediately that she wanted Walter K. to be one of the project partners. “Their upholstered furniture is simply outstanding. There aren’t many manufacturers who are so deeply involved in their craft and pay so much attention to detail,” she explains. She chose companies with a long tradition and expertise; whose products would continue to be available well into the future. The models in the house



In the former living room of the Mann family, timeless furniture serves as inspiration to read and converse: the *Andoo Lounge* armchair in blue and gray, a *Votteler Chair* and footstool, and *Oki* occasional tables, all by Walter K.



range from the 1920s to the present: all of them classics that nevertheless feel contemporary today. “The *Votteler Chair* by Walter K. manages to blend in perfectly with the other elements in the room. It is my absolute favorite piece!” Originally designed in 1956 by Arno Votteler for Walter K., the timeless armchair for reading and relaxing is inspired by Scandinavian functionalism, and artfully combines a delicate tubular steel frame with voluminous padding and solid wood armrests. Today, the designer is nearly ninety years old and incredibly flattered that his chair was selected for the house.

Ursula Seeba-Hannan has turned the *Votteler Chairs* into the protagonists of the living room of the house. The supporting actor is the light-colored *Prime Time* sofa by Walter K., a contemporary design by the EOOS team, who made a few tweaks to give it a 1950s touch: the backrest was shortened a drop and the base of the sofa is now made of dark wood.

Vanity is the enemy of comfort. And democracies can only manage as long as nobody insists on going it alone. Guided by this belief, all participants cooperated on this project. Markus Benz, CEO of Walter K., comments on the project, “For the Thomas Mann House, the companies worked together as a team, trusting one another and striving for the best result possible. These companies, which are all extremely creative and masters of their craft, are a part of the economic and cultural power of Germany.”

Along with Walter K., Thonet and other companies, Seeba-Hannan was searching for the perfect fabrics and colors. There was just one problem she had not anticipated: furniture makers usually engineer their sofas and armchairs with the bigger picture in mind, producing their designs while constantly considering the proportions, materials and upholstery. Textiles from elsewhere need to be inspected first because not every thread is up to par.



“Fellows will be living and working here for months, inviting guests over and engaging them in debate. The fellows are meant to feel at home – that’s why everything looks so natural.”

URSULA SEEBA-HANNAN LenzWerk, Berlin



The solid wood *Tadeo* table with its cross grain provides ample space for residents and visitors alike. The chairs are part of the *Andoo* range, everything by Walter K.



As though they had always been there: the *Votteler Chairs* were upholstered in a muted green fabric that has a 1940s feel. *Prime Time* sofa, *Oki* occasional table. All furniture by Walter K.

And so, Seeba-Hannan went with her bundle of samples from one manufacturer to the next to talk about her vision. She finally put together a selection, flew to Los Angeles, and laid out her collection in the house. But in that moment she saw, in the light and heat of the southern Californian sun, that she needed entirely different materials and colors than she did in northern Europe. She returned to Germany, and the upholsterers continued to test things out and advise her. “Their commitment and vast knowledge really moved me,” she recalls. In the end, she chose linen and cotton in shades of antique blue and bottle green. Seeba-Hannan could not have been more satisfied with how the upholstering team worked with this fabric – yet another example of the flexibility and professionalism of the people at Walter K.

She still thinks fondly about the villa’s inauguration, recalling the moment when the prominent sociologist Jutta Allmendinger discovered the *Votteler Chairs* in the living room and said, “They look just stunning.” As one of the first fellows in the Thomas Mann House, Allmendinger was invited to the opening, as were other fellows such as the actor Burkhard Klaußner and Thomas Mann scholar Heinrich Detering. In the future, they will all go on to sit and work at the *Andoo* solid wood table by Walter K. in Thomas Mann’s study. Seeba-Hannan recalls that the fellows were a bit hesitant at first as they walked around the rooms – until she invited them to take a seat. “Wow,” Allmendinger said after she sat down in the *Votteler Chair*. “It doesn’t just look good, it feels good, too!”

Hiltrud Bontrup

#### PROJECT

Thomas Mann House, Los Angeles, USA

#### COMPLETED

June 2018

#### ARCHITECTURE

Julius Ralph Davidson (1889–1977), Los Angeles, USA

#### INTERIOR

LenzWerk Holding, Berlin, Germany

#### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

*Andoo*, *Andoo Lounge*, *Andoo Table*, *Oki*, *Prime Time*, *Tadeo*, *Votteler Chair*

#### LOCATION

Study, dining room, living room

#### PHOTOS

LenzWerk Holding, Berlin, Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is the owner of the Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles. Funding for the house’s renovation and new furnishings was provided by the Berthold Leibinger Stiftung. The Villa Aurora & Thomas Mann House association runs the house as a transatlantic meeting place and organizes the residency program. The program is funded by the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media as well as the Berthold Leibinger Stiftung, the Alfred Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach Foundation and the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Elements in balance: in the heart of the medicine district of Tokyo, in the new building of a pharmaceutical company, the *Jaan* leather sofas by Walter K. counter the pattern on the wall and floor with supreme calm

Pharma Inc., Tokyo

Going to  
the source of life

Health, strength, healing and nature – that is at the core of daily business for a Japanese pharmaceutical company. Its headquarters in Tokyo exude these very virtues – in no small part thanks to furniture by Walter K.

**F**ukutoku garden, just five minutes from Tokyo Station, is a small green oasis amid one of the largest and liveliest cities in the world. At the entrance, visitors are greeted by a bright orange torii – a Shinto gate with two characteristic, parallel curved cross-beams. It symbolizes crossing over into a sacred realm. Two shrines stand here: the smaller Yakuso Jinja is dedicated to a god of medicine. Under a canopy of leaves, people find peace and shade.

Just behind the garden, a narrow office tower of glass, steel and aluminum is a recent addition to the skyline. It was built by the company Pharma Inc.\*, which has owned this plot of land for over one hundred years. It lies in the heart of the Nihombashi district – the “medicine city” of Tokyo – where medicine wholesalers and producers have been based since the beginning of the Edo period in the 17th century.

Pharma Inc. is deeply rooted in Japan and nowadays does business across the globe. And for the interior design of its headquarters, the celebrated brand architect Kashiwa Sato was given the following brief: “Draw on Japanese heritage and give it a contemporary twist.” He went for familiar, basic shapes: circles, ovals, straight lines. And he used a lot of wood – the traditional construction material in Japan – which has recently experienced a surge in popularity there once again.

It was no accident that creative director Kashiwa Sato realized his vision of a natural environment stripped back to its roots with handcrafted furniture by none other than Walter K.: experimenting with the elements comes as second nature to the furniture brand. All objects, their colors, shapes, materials, and even the way they are handled, are based on principles known to mankind for thousands of years. The result: in rooms with furniture by Walter K., people immediately feel at home because they

more on page 57



The black stone in the fountain reflects the Japanese characters on the wall. They were designed according to the traditional kumiki method and stand for “water” and “light”: the sources of life

### Playing with naturalness

Our age-old connection with nature is the result of a long process of evolution. Our love for the forest is hardwired into our DNA. Nature is a source of medicine, peace and spiritual clarity. In the office, elements such as wood and water boost our immune system and concentration. And when placed in the hands of expert craftsmen, they are fashioned into a paradise for the senses.

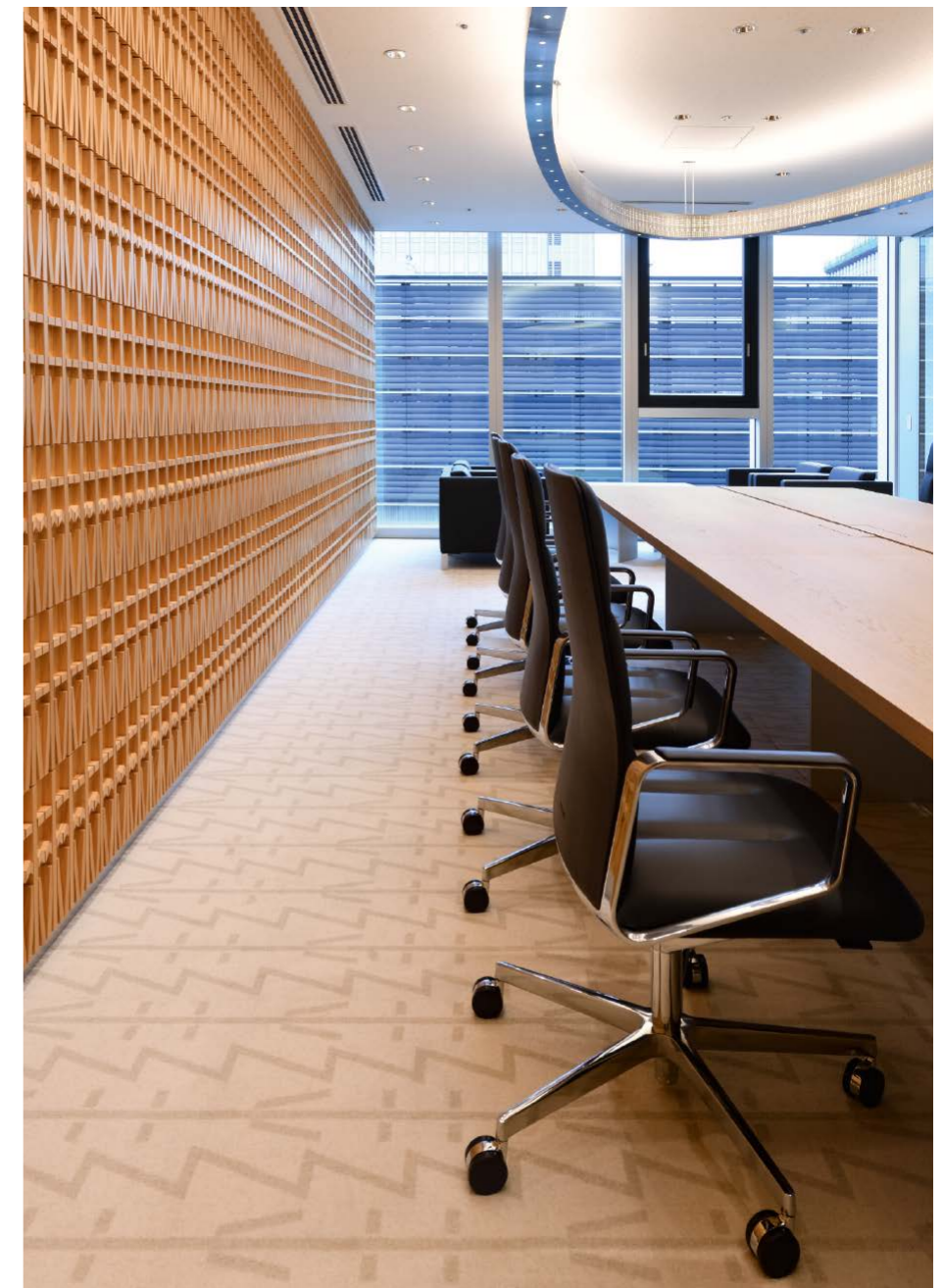


Creative director Kashiwa Sato realized his vision of a natural environment stripped down to its roots with handcrafted furniture by Walter K. He chose materials, colors and shapes that humans have intuitively understood for thousands of years. A circular light hangs above the minimalistic wooden table, and the word "future" can be made out on the wall of cypress wood. Foster 500 leather sofas by Walter K.



*"I love the process of elimination. When designing rooms, I leave as much out as possible. What remains has more impact and lasts longer."*

**KASHIWA SATO** Creative Director, Samurai Inc.



Kashiwa Sato admires Walter K.'s mixture of self-esteem and self-effacement, and its excellent craftsmanship and quality. He also found ultimate ergonomic comfort in the *Leadchair Executive*



A concentrated ambiance and comfortable *Leadchair Executive* seats by Walter K. for conferences (top), plenty of room for encounters (bottom). Underneath a ring-shaped lamp, the light-colored high table made from Hinoki cypress wood serves as a meeting place for managers in the immense space. Conversations that sprout up here are continued by staff in the *Turtle Lounge* chairs by Walter K.

intuitively understand that universal, age-old language of colors and shapes right away. Kashiwa Sato knew this too when he created a Gesamtkunstwerk in the heart of Tokyo: a tale about the source of life and health.

The story begins on the ground floor, where water trickles out of a fountain over a curved black stone (see page 53). The water flows so softly that the walls of cypress wood are reflected in it, along with the geometric structure formed by the stylized Japanese characters in the wood. The ancient technique used to achieve this is called kumiki. Those who can read Japanese will be able to make out the words “water” and “light” – the foundations of life. Past the fountain, the journey continues to the reception and the characters for “earth,” which provides health and well-being, and “trees,” which symbolize growth. Here, visitors wait on a bench that looks like a gigantic wooden puzzle. Anyone who sits on it feels as though they are in a forest.

Up in the conference rooms, the walls are covered in the character for “future.” And in the places where people come together – the cafeteria and the management floors – the theme is close bonds, or kizuna. “Bonds between people bring the world together,” says Kashiwa Sato. In this way, he is creating room for encounters. The offices and open spaces radiate calm – in stark contrast to typical offices in Japan, where every nook and cranny is put to use. “A room needs an artistic focus to work well,” says Sato. This is immediately obvious on the management floor, which is dominated by a ring-shaped high table.

Spontaneous conversations started here can be continued just a few steps away in a more intimate atmosphere complete with *Jaan* sofas and armchairs by Walter K. The characters on the wall above mean “people.” This is where they sit to discuss how to develop and improve medicinal products, or: how people can acquire more life force. The furniture by Walter K. makes a noticeable contribution to that – your lower back is supported, you do not sink into the seats and you can get up again very easily. The pharma managers can appreciate the ergonomics and comfortable upholstery when they sit down for conferences on the *Leadchair Executive*. Another plus point is that the high-quality leather is breathable. So even in the sticky Tokyo summer, it still feels pleasant.

Kashiwa Sato was told by one of his employees – sent specially to Herrenberg, the location of Walter K.’s headquarters – how Walter K. makes its furniture. The creative director loves clear-cut shapes, fine details and perfect balance in furniture. For his tale about the force of life, he deliberately chose a respected brand that was not too ostentatious. He saw in Walter K. the Bauhaus spirit, that mixture of self-esteem and self-effacement that is so pleasing to him. This is furniture for people. Sonja Blaschke

## Reduction and concentration

Quality comes from the things we don’t do. Decluttering spaces is a constant struggle for interior designers. As is arranging furniture and fittings to create a space and make people feel welcome. So that the person can loosen up – not the furniture.

### PROJECT

Pharma Inc.\*, Tokyo, Japan

### COMPLETED

March 2018

### ARCHITECTURE

Nihon Sekkei Inc., Tokyo, Japan

### INTERIOR

Kashiwa Sato, Samurai Inc., Tokyo, Japan

### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

*Foster 500, Foster 501, Foster 510, Jaan, Jason cantilever chair, Leadchair Executive, Turtle Lounge*

### LOCATION

Conference room, lounge, open space

### PHOTOS

Masahiro Ishibashi, Tokyo, Japan

\*Pharma Inc. is a pseudonym. We have changed the name at the request of the company. It has a global presence and employs around one thousand staff at its headquarters in Tokyo.



# The executive office of the twenty-first century



Agility and stability. The headquarters of one of Europe's largest banks brings together the best of two worlds – thanks to furniture by Walter K.

The surfaces of the desks are finished in velvety nutwood, which radiates credibility and trustworthiness.  
*Exec-V* desk, *Leadchair* Executive swivel chair, *Kyo* bucket seat, *Mason* table, *Jangwa* carpet.  
All by Walter K.



The headquarters keeps workspaces available for the executives that arrive from a thousand branches across the world. Those who get along well sit together in a two-person office: *Leadchair Management* swivel chair, *Exec-V* desk, *Storage System*. All furniture by Walter K.



*“Bankers want an atmosphere that exudes naturalness and perfection in equal measure. Valuable. Durable. Sustainable.”*

LUCAS M. WEBER Director, Corporate Business, Walter K.

Every morning, the chairman takes his place on the upholstered seat of a *Leadchair Executive*. He likes the look of the shining metal base, which matches the chrome legs of his *Exec-V* desk. The desk is two and a half meters long and one meter wide, and it is from here that the manager leads an international bank. The man values discretion, which is why he is not identified here. The entire management board appreciates the virtues of restraint, naturalness and perfection. The headquarters is located in one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. In the past two years, more than four floors have been redesigned – for working, receiving guests and dining.

The interior is intended to support daily work. And of course, the surroundings should exude a sense of esteem – esteem for the employees and clients, but also esteem and respect for the responsibility that is borne on a daily basis here. That's why the choice of furniture fell to Walter K., whose materials, forms, surfaces and details directly communicate these values. The *Scale-Media* conference tables, *Jangwa* hand-knotted carpets, *Storage System* in nutwood, *Exec-V* desks and *Leadchairs* all reflect the bank's work ethic.

Bankers need privacy. Like most executives, they require spaces in which they can conduct confidential conversations. At the same time, openness is a key



### Agility

Customer needs are changing fast, and companies need to keep up the same pace. One useful approach is to use open-plan offices, which facilitate a rapid exchange of information, shorten communication paths and encourage creative teamwork among employees. To complement the large rooms, there are separate, quiet zones for calling clients, brainstorming and thinking.



Coolness and warmth: The terrazzo floor provides the foundation for dark wood and silky leather in the open-plan office (above) and in the open area furnished with *Andoo* barstools (left page, top). In the boardroom (below left) *Jangwa* carpets create cozy islands. This is where high-ranking individuals sit down in the *Foster 502* armchairs and, according to several observers, unconsciously start stroking the soft aniline leather. *Exec-V* desks, *Leadchair Executive* swivel chairs, *Storage System*. All by Walter K.

consideration. Concepts like teamwork, modern management and agility have also made their way into boardrooms. Collectively captured by the term New Work, these concepts culminate in communication that is direct, condensed and rapid. This flexibility and openness, coupled with discretion, needed to be translated into the surrounding.

Each of the nearly dozen board members now has a “trilogy” at their disposal – a series of three interconnected rooms: the first with a desk and comfortable chairs, for both working and receiving clients; the second for administrative support; and the third for conferences. Across the hall the closest associates work in agile spaces: large offices for six, eight, ten or fourteen people.

In the run-up to meetings of the supervisory board, the floors bustle with people, as members arrive from all across the world. The conferences take place at a table that can be arranged in a V shape. For security reasons, the board members also dine on site, seated at a seven-meter-long *Scale-Media*.

And thus here, at the headquarters of one of the world's oldest banks, furniture from Walter K. makes it possible to unite two virtues: modernity and tradition. In today's world, every organization needs to demonstrate flexibility, vibrancy, transparency and openness – not only to stay on top of their market but also to appeal to employees. At the same time, it is important to preserve and pass on convictions and values. Furniture, which literally gives us something to hold on to throughout our day, transforms immaterial values into material experience. *Carsten Jasner*



#### COMPLETED

October 2018

#### ARCHITECTURE

EM2N, Zurich, Switzerland

#### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

*Andoo* barstool, *Exec-V*, *Foster 500 Table*, *Foster 502*, *Frame Lite*, *Hausmann 310*, *Legends of Carpets – Jangwa*, *Kyo*, *Leadchair Executive*, *Leadchair Management*, *Mason*, *Scale-Media*, *Storage System*, *bespoke V-Table*

#### LOCATION

Office, executive offices, conference room, open space

#### RENDERINGS

screen ID digital imaging, Offenbach, Germany

The company is one of the oldest banks in Europe. They wish to remain anonymous.



# The

What is it that actually determines the way we work – the way we organize our offices and projects? Is it the process? The function?

That's not looking at the whole picture, says Markus Benz, CEO of Walter K. The third dimension is missing: the situation.

It is time to start thinking differently

It is companies that create a mindset – and it is offices that harbor identity. If you go to the doctor tomorrow, the moment you step into the office you'll know – consciously or unconsciously – whether you feel like you will be well cared for, whether you can trust the doctor or not. Even, perhaps, if you have never seen the doctor before. The same rule applies to other spaces, like legal firms, hotels and, of course, offices. People read spaces like they do faces – in a split second – and react correspondingly: with affection or aversion, trust or mistrust.

Our environment changes the way we think and act. In the age of the brand, digitalization and demographic change, it should be no surprise that offices are no longer a matter of secondary importance. On the contrary: the office is the powerhouse of the company. People should, at the very least, feel comfortable there. But for a long time even that was not the norm.

Offices used to resemble dreary cells. Endless rows of gray table-tops, beige laminate floors, spaces for the strict eight-hour workday. Design and materials were geared towards durability and exuded an infinite dullness – and it was no different in the upscale furniture segment. The approach was functionality: here is the boss's office, there the conference room; here the coffee maker, there the employees' cubicles. The value of the furniture was based on the status of its user.

In the mid-1990s, a new attitude towards life took hold and, bit by bit, conquered the world of offices, including in Germany. At the dawn of the new millennium, our way of seeing things became more international. Architecture, art, design, internet and digitalization began their victory march around the world. And so the bar was raised for design in general – and office design in particular.

But something else happened: paper disappeared, there were fewer and fewer documents and folders, screens on desktops shrank, and in their place were screens for video conferences and presentations in meeting rooms. White boards, flip charts, presentation kits.

# situation

# manifesto

by  
Markus Benz

Suddenly people were talkative in the workplace because what happened needed to be recorded and processed. Work became more and more digital – and our tools followed suit. It is here that we began asking ourselves questions about processes. And we are still dealing with those questions today: What function do people have? What do they need in order to fulfill that function? How can a company foster an individual's creativity, performance and motivation?

These were good, pertinent and important questions. But up to this point, space has been basically treated the same as process. However, in order to achieve the above-mentioned effects – that is, to boost creativity, motivation and performance at once – it is necessary to have open and organic spaces. Surroundings that create connections. Rooms that are flexible. So we can work in the way the situation calls for.

People working in an office have an average of four to six meetings per day – and they are all different. At the same time, there is often a limited number of rooms in companies' offices. And that is why, today, we are designing offices and conference rooms to be able to offer more – different areas for different situations. A state-of-the-art conference room can host a large group at the conference table; we can have private meetings in a carpeted lounge area nearby; across from that, we can hold quick team meetings at the standing height table or the upholstered bench near the window.

That is how the situation – a mix of furniture and zones – becomes relevant to the office. Places for different types of encounters, sometimes private, sometimes casual. Conference tables become slim and foldable because that allows the room to be used without a table, too. And traditional desks can also become standing desks for small morning meetings.

This is the time for leaders to be sensible. Today a manager's chief task is communication. It is thus even more important that managers can find and take advantage of the right situation for their meeting: the conference room, the sofa, the bench, the standing height table. So in order to spread this communication and foster creativity, performance, ideas and success, it is essential to create pleasant, open, valuable and flexible spaces. How can you recognize such spaces? You will be able to tell as soon as you walk into the room.

Treat for the senses: opulent armchairs, earthy tones and brass details create a warm refuge in the heart of the city. *Isanka Chairs* by Walter K.

Beyond by Geisel, Munich

# Home away from home

The private hoteliers Geisel have created a residence in Munich that its guests will never want to leave. Thanks to the spacious reading room, around-the-clock kitchen service and sumptuous seating by Walter K., guests feel as if they are staying with generous friends



Inviting charm: the barstools and chairs from the 375 range by Walter K. huddle around the open-plan kitchen and provide comfort in the peaceful bedrooms



Premier seats: at the floor-to-ceiling windows, guests at Beyond can enjoy the view onto the bustling city streets. *Foster 520* by Walter K.

High above Marienplatz in Munich, at eye level with the glockenspiel of the New Town Hall, is Beyond by Geisel. You can take the name quite literally: Beyond is your second home located on the fifth and sixth floors above the city and far away from everyday life. It is a refuge for people who want to have some time to themselves, invite friends over or get to know like-minded individuals. Just like in a country house, guests settle into their rooms and can meet up in the central two-story library or the wine room, where they can help themselves to the exquisite selection. Hand-crafted furniture by Walter K., such as the timelessly elegant 375 or the sumptuously upholstered seats and sofas from the *Isanka* range, provide the perfect setting for relaxing and chatting.

Inviting comfort in intimate spaces: with this concept, the hotel – or city residence – is following an international trend. The Munich-based private hoteliers Carl, Stephan and Michael Geisel have created a place with character where guests feel as welcome as

they would in the home of a good friend. By perching on a 375 bar stool at the counter of the open-plan kitchen or sinking into a *Foster 520* in their rooms, guests can take in their surroundings of brass details, wood in reddish hues and textiles in shades of honey and ochre. They exude coziness and warmth. The renowned designers from the Madrid-based agency Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos have worked with Walter K. to create a landscape of earthy tones in a spacious grotto that soothes body and soul. All the while, the city is at the guests' feet. Behind floor-to-ceiling windows, the towers, tiled roofs and the neo-Gothic façade of the town hall become part of the place. Guests feel as if they are floating over the Marienplatz in the *Isanka* sofa.

The hotel is open to private functions, exclusive parties and corporate events. Once inside, there is no real reason to leave. The kitchen is open around the clock, and meals and drinks are included in the room price. Those who still want to experience

everyday life in the city need only step outside the hotel. Guests are immediately engulfed by the hustle and bustle of Marienplatz, drifting between commotion and gritty Munich charm, before the craving for a cozy retreat catches up with them. *Ralf Grauel*

### Immersive travel

Immersing oneself in a city means soaking in its rhythm, colors and sounds – and choosing a hotel that mirrors the spirit of the place with customized design and top-quality furniture. Amidst the splendid solitude and top-quality furniture, travelers find peace and space for the senses.

#### PROJECT

Beyond by Geisel, Munich, Germany

#### COMPLETED

November 2017

#### INTERIOR

Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos, Madrid, Spain

#### WALTER K. PRODUCTS

375, *Isanka Chair*, *Isanka Sofa*, *Foster 520*

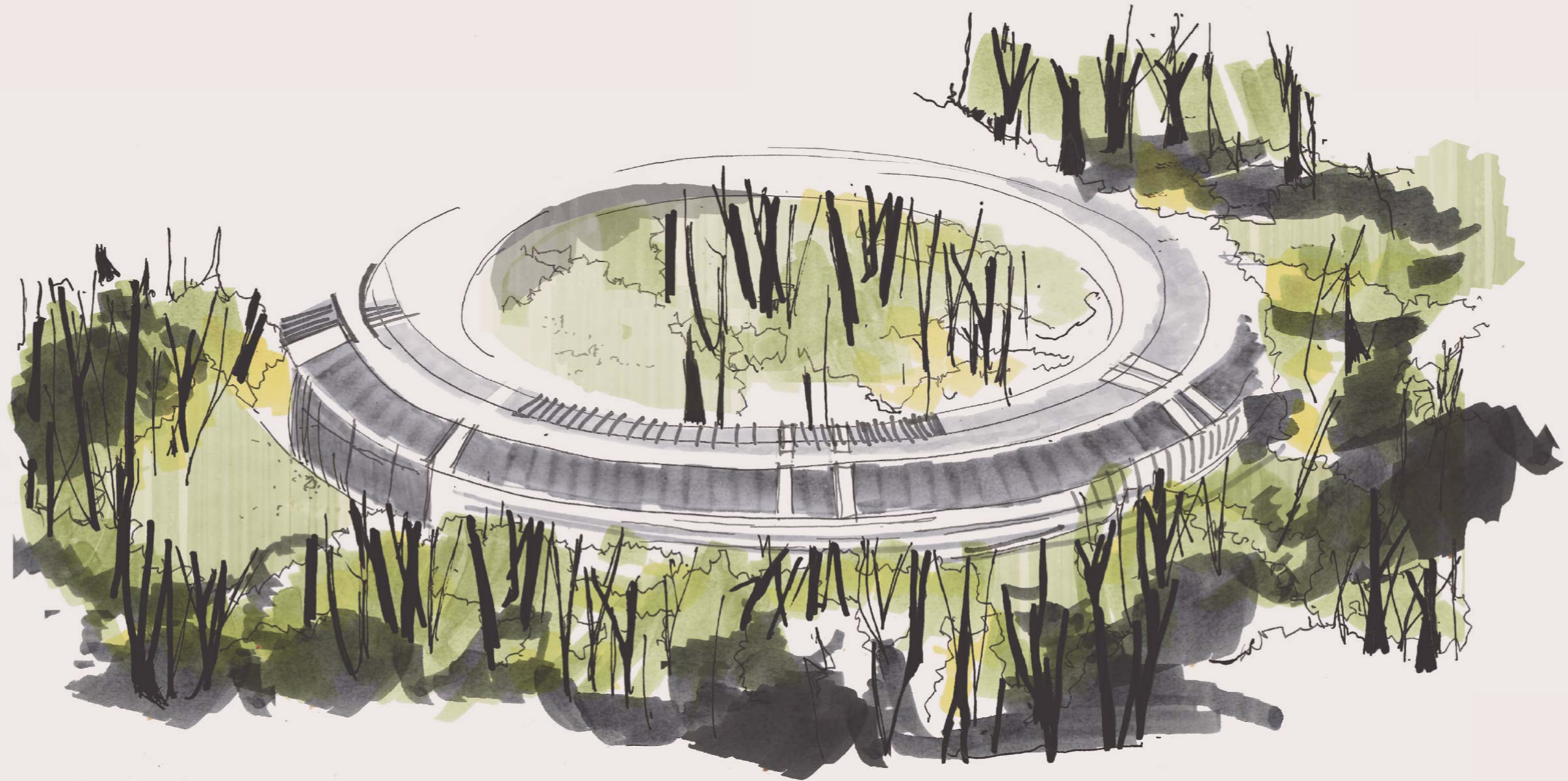
#### LOCATION

Hotel rooms, kitchen, suite, wine room

#### PHOTOS

Roland Halbe, Stuttgart, Germany  
Marc Oeder, Munich, Germany

The company Geisel Privathotels has been in family ownership for over one hundred years. The brothers Carl, Michael and Stephan run four hotels and four restaurants in Munich, including Königshof, which is one of the "Leading Hotels of the World."



Free of hierarchy, without beginning or end: Apple's high-tech ring in Silicon Valley perfectly embodies corporate culture of the digital age. It was designed by the architect Norman Foster.

# Look at us work!

by Oliver Elser

Tech giants Apple, Google and Facebook are in fierce competition for the world's most spectacular corporate headquarters. The workplace has become a brand's showroom. An exploration of the past, present and future of headquarters

The Circle”, a novel by Dave Eggers, was published in October 2013. The book quickly became an international bestseller. The story takes place at a fictitious American tech company called The Circle in Silicon Valley, easily recognizable as a mix of Google, Apple and Facebook. A young woman – in the film adaptation, the character is played by Emma Watson (the precocious Hermione in the “Harry Potter” series) – begins working for the company but soon realizes that the company wants to have complete control of all the personal data in the world. The first readers of this book did not need to wait for the movie to come out to have a vivid picture in their minds of the sort of beautiful new office landscape where the heroine finds herself losing a little bit more of her private life every day. Just that same year, the computer giant Apple presented its own real-life version of “The Circle”: a gigantic, circular office building, a sort of sharp-edged high-tech doughnut, designed by none other than the man of steel-glass-transparency himself: the British architect Norman Foster, who, incidentally, has also been designing furniture for Walter K. since 1999.

Was it a coincidence, then, that the tech utopia of the novel had the same unmistakable shape and emerged at the same time as the new Apple Park? Probably, given that the writer and the architect did not have any contact with one another. But it is possible that Eggers had been familiar with another doughnut-shaped building that was built in 2004: the headquarters of the UK intelligence agency GCHQ in Benhall. And yet, that such a circle appeared twice in 2013 could not have been a complete coincidence. Somebody simply must have come up with the idea of the circle – the perfect geometric shape without beginning or end that possesses a mercurial lightness free of hierarchy, and that allows all 12,000 top employees to be visible at all times. It is such a strong image, such a perfect symbol for the corporate culture of the digital era, that it was only a matter of time until someone made their corporate headquarters in the shape of a ring.

For years, the half a dozen corporations that are constantly reinventing our world have been in a fierce competition for the most extravagant, symbolically powerful and innovative office building. The biggest names in architecture have been summoned. The champion of this competition will be the company that

can do two things: rack up the highest construction costs and execute the wildest design. Of course, the new corporate headquarters must meet the standards of global communication. The more the architecture conforms to the essence of the brand the better. Show me how you work and I’ll tell you who you are: from the brand to the architecture to the floor plan.

The new Facebook headquarters was the first one finished, or rather, demonstrably half-finished, which seemed appropriate given that the world’s most important social network is itself a constant work in progress. The architect Frank Gehry designed the largest continuous office space in the world for Mark Zuckerberg, with 2,800 employees sitting together on the same level. It looks wild and chaotic, like a children’s birthday party that nobody ever wants to leave.

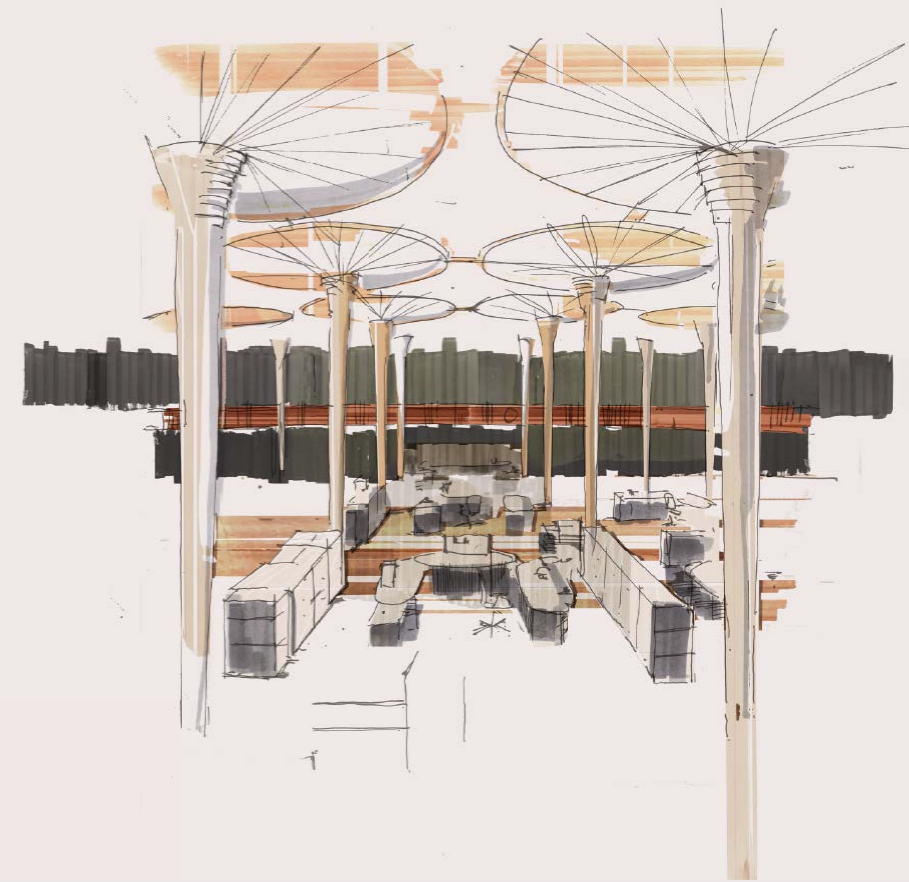
Google, however, let the architects Bjarke Ingels (BIG) and Thomas Heatherwick relive the visions of the 1960s. In the first design phase, everything was bubble-shaped and made of transparent, lightweight plastic, as though the science fiction icon Barbarella had been sitting in on the brainstorming session and appealed to Google’s honor. So, if you want to make the world a better place (“Don’t be evil” was Google’s motto for years), you may end up dealing with the unfulfilled dreams of hippie architecture. Meanwhile, the plans are looking a lot more conventional. The office landscape will be inaugurated under lightweight camping tarps in 2019.

In short, Apple is building an UFO, Facebook is cobbling together a shed and Google is pitching tents. But how new are the offices really on the inside? They are wooing the same clientele, after all. In order to recruit the best and the brightest, the high-tech corporations all offer gyms on the premises, outstanding food, communication zones, flexible meeting areas and a full package of leisure activities near the office (which Dave Eggers so artfully parodies in “The Circle”).

### Offices in the style of a landscape architect

What distinguishes the headquarters is the way they deal with the outside world. While at Apple Park, workers are meant to dream their way into the landscape and, in a sort of transcendental experience, also forget the boundaries of the physical world. It is similar to the way in which Apple users – who are not sold a phone but a brightly shining window into another world – are meant to slip away. Meanwhile, the employees of Facebook seem to be stuck in their building in the same way as its users are as they scroll endlessly through a never-ending Timeline.

In principle, these concepts are not as new as they seem. Facebook’s architect Frank Gehry, who became one of the best-known stars in contemporary architecture thanks to his innovative design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, had also come up with the idea



Inverted: without windows and supported by mushroom-shaped columns – this was how Frank Lloyd Wright designed the open-plan office of the company Johnson Wax in Wisconsin in the 1930s

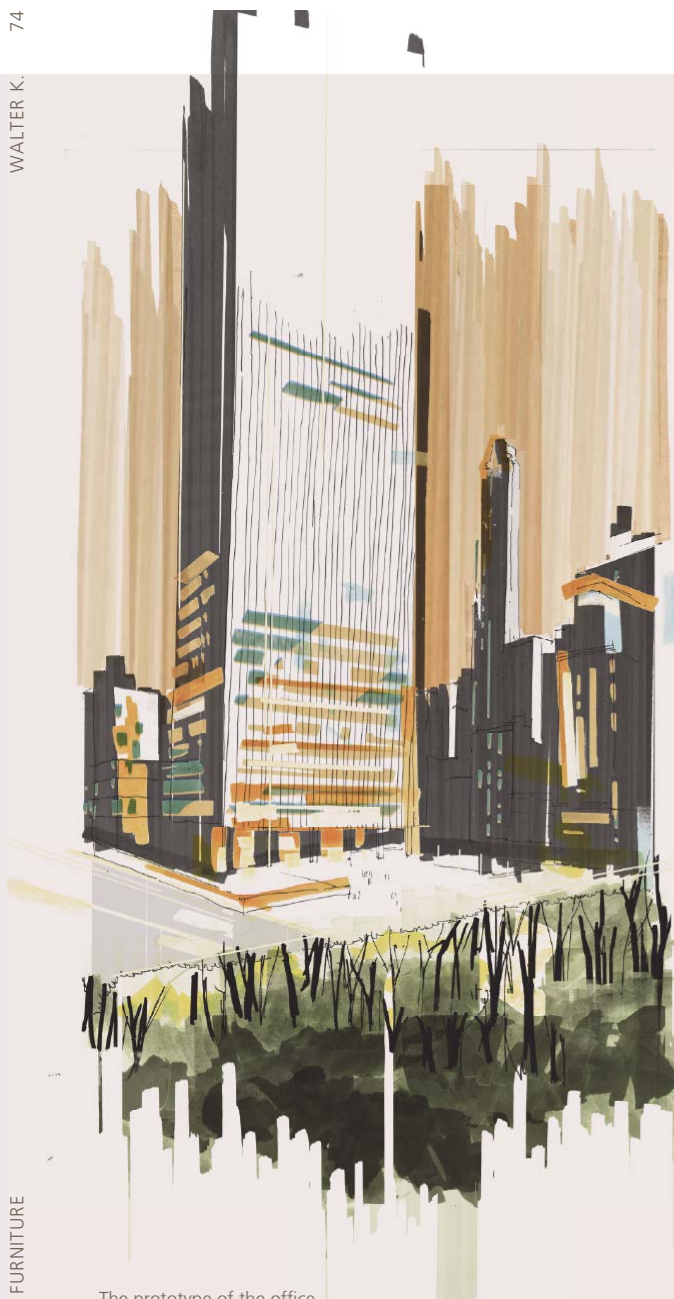
for the original office of the chaotic creative in the 1980s, namely, for the advertising agency Chiat/Day in Venice Beach, Los Angeles. In the 1990s, the same agency would propagate the concept of the virtual office – a playful, multicolor landscape without assigned desks – well over a decade before laptop and smartphone technology was developed enough to make that fantasy come true.

And still much earlier, in the 1930s, the architect Frank Lloyd Wright devoted himself to the design of a new factory. He was equally as detail-obsessed as Apple’s chief design officer Jonathan Ive is today, who put years of creative energy into perfecting the new company headquarters. Wright also wanted to make a “Gesamtkunstwerk” for the company Johnson Wax. Only under protest did he let himself be stopped by practical considerations, such as when dozens of employees complained after they had fallen off their wobbly three-wheeled office chairs, which Wright had designed just so, and the designer finally conceded, indulging them by adding a fourth wheel.

The giant open-plan office building in Racine, Wisconsin, one of the first of its kind, is still in use today. The idea of the office landscape did not exist back then. The desks stood, and still stand, in the middle of a vast, beautiful hall – supported by a forest of tall mushroom-shaped columns – without a trace of a private space. This was where management and bookkeeping sat. The



Opening in 2019: Google’s new headquarters under camping tarps, designed by the architects Bjarke Ingels and Thomas Heatherwick



The prototype of the office tower: Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building from the 1950s in Manhattan

chemists researching polishing paste based on tropical wax types, on the other hand, were given their very own Research Tower, which could be seen from miles away. However, the researchers were not there to enjoy the view – they were there to work. For that reason, the architect developed a façade of horizontal glass pipes which stretched and dissected the outside world, as though it were being seen through a fun house mirror. The Johnson Wax Headquarters was dubbed a factory of the future in specialist and mass media publications all over the world. But it remained a virtual “brand space” that could only be experienced from afar in photographs. The same went for the spectacular factory architecture that was emerging in Germany at the same time, such as the Fagus Factory by Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus school, or the expressionist

multicolor entry building of the Hoechst chemical plant by Peter Behrens. The public kept its distance.

It was not until the 1950s that office buildings which could fall into the “experiential spaces” category started to crop up: strong corporate architecture that could directly benefit city inhabitants, whether they were being targeted as customers or were simply doing well out of it. The Seagram Building – the prototype of the minimal, elegant office skyscraper, imitations of which were erected hundreds of times the world over – is still unmatched in its spaciousness today. Sometimes there is nothing like the original. Mies van der Rohe designed the tower for a Canadian whiskey company which previously had a New York branch in the world-famous Chrysler Building. The latter was a strong example of corporate architecture in its own right – a triumphant symbol for the rise of the American automotive industry thanks to Henry Ford's groundbreaking assembly line. Now, however, in the 1950s, people needed even stronger stuff and so new companies began to dominate the skyline. Thanks to the series “Mad Men”, we have recently been reminded of what life was like back then, especially at the workplace.

### Software companies become wellness oases

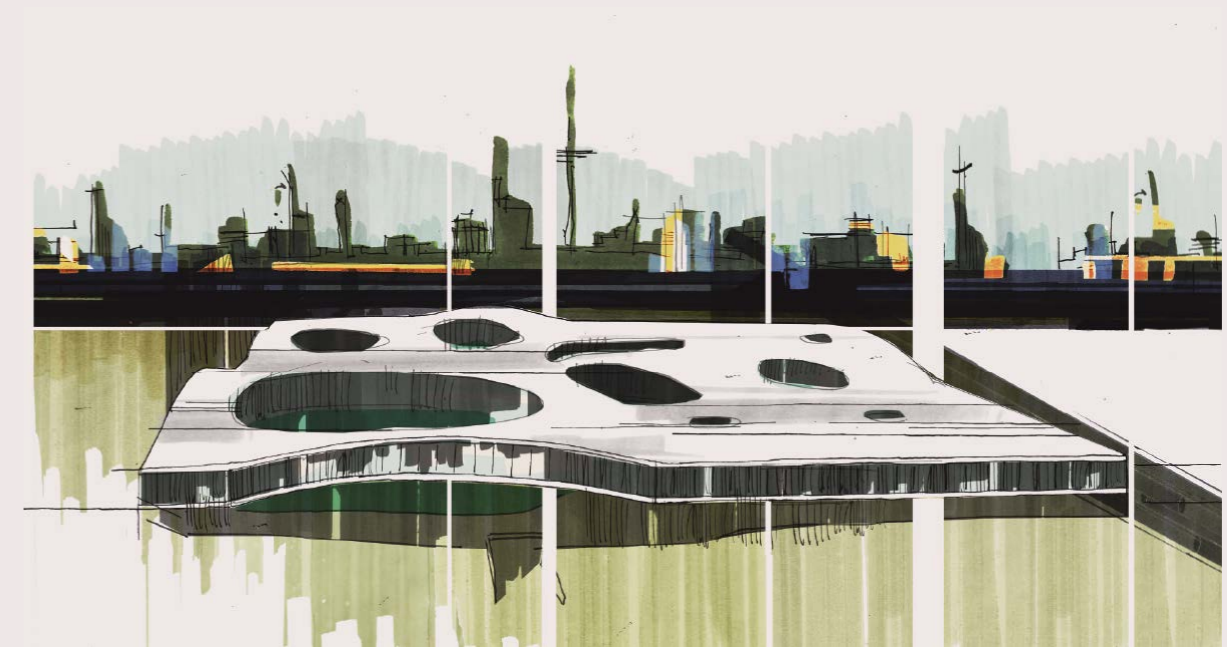
Mies did something that would, in due course, cost his client much more money on top of what he already had spent on the building: the architect convinced him that the building should be set far back from Park Avenue so there could be a big open space in front with water. It was the ultimate expression of luxury, even decadence, to not take advantage of every square inch of space permitted by law in a city as densely populated as New York. Needless to say, nobody has ever done it again. For the city then fined the building's owner, demanding him to pay taxes on the maximum amount of commercial space that could potentially fit in the undeveloped space – taxes that were far higher than the profits that could actually be attained. But the architect put elegance above all else. And New Yorkers are grateful to him to this very day for the opportunity to flock to Seagram Plaza on their lunch break. Ever since, such grand spatial gestures are only possible when they involve property deals that designate a certain amount of public space to offset a maximized exploitation of commercial real estate.

Today, the boundaries are being blurred: offices are becoming permeable, corporations are building marketplaces and software company offices are fancying themselves wellness spas. Still, it is not all as bad as it seems: the workplace is getting more colorful, lively and diverse as a result while, at the same time, the bar is being raised for companies. Whoever opens themselves up will be seen – and what is there will have

to be well thought out and well made.

Meanwhile, the arguably most radical public space-cum-workspace, was not made possible by a company but the EPFL, a public university of applied sciences in Lausanne, Switzerland. The Rolex Learning Center, also known as “The Wave,” was designed by the Japanese architecture firm SANAA, and resembles, from above, two giant, wavy slices of holey Swiss cheese placed neatly on top of one another. Students can be found between the slices. The floor curves so dramatically that a table cannot stand up straight on it. And that is precisely why it is a beloved place to study for groups and individuals. The Rolex Learning Center, inaugurated in 2010, is proof of how the power of architecture can create a pull and how maximum openness can, however paradoxically, improve concentration. Everything happens on the wavy surface; there is nowhere for people to hide.

The next experiment with this kind of all-purpose space is currently taking shape in Berlin. The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has designed an office building for the digital division of the German media company Axel Springer that called for a typical Berlin block to be hollowed out. Though it was not done in the usual way by clearing space for an interior courtyard: it was done with a horizontal cut. There, in the hollowed center of the building, desks will be spread out over dozens of platforms; the atmosphere will be unique. Dave Eggers could write a new book about it and call it *The Hive*. Will the experiment release unforeseen energy among the employees? Or will it remain a structural declaration of intent that the company is putting on display to give itself a fresh new image? Or can it do both things at once? The opening is slated for 2020, but people have already taken a great interest in it. Some are already hailing it as the first experimental building to be constructed in Berlin since the fall of the Berlin Wall.



Maximum openness: the holey, wavy Rolex Learning Center in Lausanne is a popular place among students. The idea came from the Japanese architecture firm SANAA

### Written by

Oliver Elser is a curator at Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt and regularly writes articles on architecture, design and technology for newspapers and magazines (such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine* or *AD Architectural Digest*).

# Furniture

Furniture turns brand promises into real sensory experiences. It translates values into individual impressions. In the following pages you will get to know people who put all their knowledge, passion and craftsmanship into our products. So that the ingenious ideas of architects and designers metamorphose into uniquely beautiful chairs, tables and upholstered benches by Walter K.



En route to the workshop: as mediator, Jürgen Röhm is often on the move around Walter K.'s traditional premises

## “The qualities of nature give furniture character.”

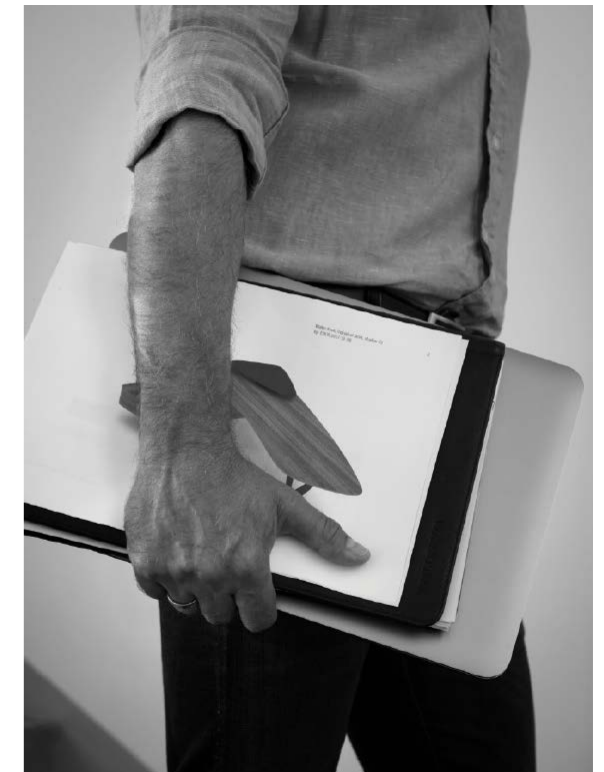
Jürgen Röhm, the innovator

Developing a new piece of furniture is a voyage of discovery. Constructors, upholsterers and seamstresses are venturing into unknown territory with designers. As the expedition leader, I'm mediating between creatives and craftspeople. The former give us direction, making their sketches and plans, and the latter are digging down and collecting what they find. If all goes well, what we end up with is treasure – the perfect rendition of design in technology, construction, material, form and function.

Our aim is for our customer to get a perfect product. This means that our expedition might take a little longer. In the case of the *Leadchair*, it lasted five years. Three times, the designers altered the design for the better. The chair we discovered at the end of the process has almost nothing in common with the initial idea. But it is perfect!

We never develop a product for the product's sake. There is always a single, strong idea. Can we add new value to the category of the sofa or table – a new function, technology, or aesthetic? This might be a wonderful softness to the touch, an extraordinary seam pattern, or a fascinating surface.

Leather, wood, wool: we work with natural materials. And this fact harbors another exciting challenge. The beauty of nature has no limits. Technology can only control nature up to a certain point. So our designs and processes always take into account these wonderful variations and idiosyncrasies. We call it imperfection in perfection. That might sound lofty, but for us it's another factor that enhances the value of our products. Because our goal is to develop furniture with its own special character.



Mission *Tama Desk*: Jürgen Röhm with graphics for a new, sculptural Walter K. desk



What Jürgen Röhm has to say about the development of the *Tama Desk* — page 94





The looped fabric of the new *Liz-M* chair is everything at once: the armrest, seat, suspension and cover. Here, Oliver Siegelin is pulling it over the chair's frame



Multicolor threads give the fabric a three-dimensional look

“The designer is the one who sets the beat, comes up with the melody – and we look for the harmonies to go with it.”

Oliver Siegelin, model maker



How the *Liz-M* chair became a lightweight — page 114

I'm a sort of bandleader for my team. We play together, but I lead the rehearsals. The pieces we play are only partly composed. The designer is the one who sets the beat, comes up with the melody – and we look for the harmonies to go with it. What mood does the sofa want to express? How would I like to sit on it?

A sofa is a feeling sculpted into a shape. When I look at a design, I think about how we can express that feeling; how we can marry technical requirements with high-quality craftsmanship and beauty. I think about piping, invisible zippers, drawn-ins, creased upholstery – these details are my passion. They are also what make a piece of furniture into a Walter K. product.

We figure out solutions as a team. The upholsterers and seamstresses explore ideas and paths. We might think that a folded seam on a delicate armrest would be nice, though it's not until we have the life-sized model standing in front of us that we can decide whether it works. We strive for perfection *and* feasibility. The art lies in achieving both.

Often years go by before a design is ready for the production line. I always ask myself: are we on the right path? Should we consider pursuing a previous idea? Taking a break from the design can also be helpful. In the case of the *Leadchair* range, the balance between form and function had to be reconciled. We then felt we needed to give the upholstery more of a meaningful character. At some point I came across the club chair that Walter K. introduced in Germany in 1907: could we take some element from this perfect structure for our chair? When we find solutions like that – that is a phenomenal feeling.



Upholstery is like a pair of arms. Yielding gently, then taking me up. A sofa should be like a trained body: it should look good, feel good, instill confidence, offer safety, and carry me with ease. And hopefully a smile.

I build upholstery slowly, in several layers. There are many things to consider in the process. How thick should the bottom, middle, and top layers of foam be? What belts or metal springs are suitable for the suspension? What kind of cotton, what kind of fleece? Do I want to finish the top layer with feathers and down? That would be something special. A sheaf of down makes for a wonderful landscape, with a light look and soft feel.

For living rooms, I develop deep and voluminous upholsteries. Sitting in them, you should feel as though you are sinking into a cloud and being caught with the utmost care. But if a sofa is going to be used frequently by many people – in an office, waiting room, or airport – I need a firmer, more durable upholstery, although even this must be comfortable and must embrace me.

I have a very sensitive body. I can feel at once if the upholstery is right. It's difficult to describe, because it's a question of experience and sensation. If a mother is baking a cake, she takes "a handful of flour." She doesn't know exactly how many grams that is. It's the same with me. My hands, my instinct – these are incredibly important. What's the touch like? How does it feel to take hold of the upholstery? At the end, I put the cover on. I squeeze, knead, and pound it. It's rather like a massage. To get the body in trim. And then, in the showroom or at a trade fair, I love to watch people sit on it. Do their faces relax? Do they stroke the armrest with their hand? Do they nod in contentment?



How Elmar Böing has helped develop the *Jaan Silent* sofa — page 122



Elmar Böing uses different gauges of needles and awls to design details for Walter K. upholstered furniture – like the ornamental seams on the new *Jaan Silent* sofa (below)

“Good upholstery instills confidence and offers safety.”

Elmar Böing, the development upholsterer



“A good seam gives the eye a direction in which to look, guiding it to the valuable details.”

Julia Schroeder, the development seamstress



Julia Schroeder explains the part seams play in the Foster 620 upholstered bench — page 128



Which seam works with which material? Where should the lines run in a piece of furniture? Questions that are resolved in a long development process at Walter K.

A good seam gives the eye a direction in which to look, guiding it to the valuable details. And it does this without being obtrusive. The color of the thread is usually related to the color of the material. But sometimes, the thread can also provide contrast, for example a light thread in dark saddle leather. The length of the stitches should be well balanced – it is often ideal for holes to be four millimeters apart. Finding the optimum is a developmental process, at the end of which I have the perfect seam in front of me, bearing witness to excellence in craftsmanship.

I have high standards in my work. When we develop a new sofa, I try out various decorative seams – folded seams, fell seams – using different needles, hole distances, threads. I get quite uneasy if the seam doesn't get put in the right place – you can feel the imperfection. I'm fascinated by getting the right seam in the right place.

When I develop a sewing plan, I think myself into the cover. The skin of the sofa is there in my mind's eye. Which seam do I start with, and which parts do I assemble in which order? If I make a mistake, our seamstresses are landed with a heavy burden – a leather cover weighs eight or nine kilos. When I run my fingers over the seam, I can feel whether the tension is right. A good seam in warm, soft leather should feel like coming home. Like an embrace. Like a promise that the seam is going to last.



In the development department, Julia Schroeder plans how the seamstresses will later assemble the pieces



Measuring, calculating, tinkering and thinking about the long-term behavior of the material – Rainer Brinkmann makes sure Walter K. furniture stands securely and withstands all the demands placed on it



“What makes a product truly fascinating is the marriage of craftsmanship and technology.”

Rainer Brinkmann, the constructor



More about *Conference-X* and its technical subtleties — page 106

If a table were a house, I would be the structural engineer. I calculate tensile loads and compressive forces, construct pillars, struts, frames. I draw the basic structure to exact dimensions on my computer. The thing to bear in mind is that even though every piece of furniture we make is the product of perfect craftsmanship, all our products also have a technological core.

What makes a product truly fascinating is the marriage of craftsmanship and technology. That's exactly what “Made in Germany” means. We're located in a region that is brimming with leading technology firms. In our development process, we work closely together with companies that are also involved in research for the automotive industry.

Take the soft edges of our *Tama Desk*, for example. We shape these with special care, using a unique vacuum process. We cast the legs of our *Conference-X* in solid aluminum. Beforehand, I must precisely calculate how much the metal will expand in the heat and contract again when cooled. And we only find out if my calculations were correct when the parts emerge from the mold. That's always an exciting moment.

With *Conference-X*, for example, the delicate feet support the center in an X shape. But how would the table react to loads placed on its edge? When it was finished, I sat on the very rim. I weigh eighty kilos. The calculations were right! The table didn't wobble at all.

I fight for every detail. You'll often find me lying under a table thinking about connections and cable ports. A single button can preoccupy me for three days. I spent months tinkering with one small occasional table. The problem was how to construct a solid wooden leg so that it could tolerate both heat and cold. We got there in the end. And the solution was simple and ingenious – which is a fantastic feeling.



### The room planning tool

The pCon.planner is the most popular professional room and interior planning system for office and contract. The tools and functions are sophisticated yet intuitive, and the database contains the products of many manufacturers. Users range from manufacturers and dealers to architectural firms, interior designers and facility managers.



# The planning office in your pocket

People customize their cars to suit them perfectly. And they do the same with sneakers. And soon they will also configure high-quality sofas, tables, chairs, armchairs, upholstered benches, carpets and their own interiors. Discover how Walter K. is digitalizing the future of furniture-buying, and how retailers, architects, planners and even customers are benefitting from this



### pCon.box

#### The mobile furniture configuration tool

A mobile app for smartphones and tablets (also available as web version) that allows users to playfully configure furniture in 3D, and design, plan and calculate entire spaces. With the app, users can take photos of floor plans and then fill them with furniture. In an augmented reality feature the furniture can also be placed within real rooms. The app was developed to help improve the customer experience at the point of sale. It is easy and fun to use, but also incredibly professional. Each configuration can be exported in various data formats, sent via email, WhatsApp or SMS, or downloaded.



### pCon.facts

#### The digital furniture catalog

In addition to pCon.box, professionals can also use pCon.facts, a mobile application containing details, images and additional information. Dealers, planners and architects can find assembly instructions, certificates, product brochures and high-quality photos here. This gives them another valuable tool for inspiring and retaining customers with impressive presentations and also includes an AR feature.

Not that long ago, customers often went to the retailer up to seven times before buying a sofa. They would embark on a journey through various stores, try out different models, study catalogs and slowly but surely form an opinion before returning to one of the retailers – and buying their sofa. This journey still takes place today, but now it leads through the internet. And when they show up at a retailer, they are often very well informed – it only takes one or two visits for them to make a decision. If retailers cannot answer a question at this juncture, they run the risk of losing their customers.

Smartphones make for smart customers. Everyone has access to a photo album, address book, calendar, music library, conversations, dictionaries, department stores, travel agencies, account balances – as a matter of fact, to the entire world. And so, hardly any big purchases are made without prior online research. Walter K. is turning this digital customer journey – from visiting the website to planning and configuring furniture at the retailer – into an interactive experience that takes place right on your smartphone.

Walter K. has just entered into a strategic partnership with the German software company EasternGraphics. For many years, EasternGraphics has been operating the pCon.planner: the standard software for room planning in office and contract

spaces. The software company has thus bridged the gap between the planning office on one end and the retailer/end consumer on the other. The tools include an updated mobile app for interior design (pCon.box) and a digital furniture catalog (pCon.facts). They are fun to use and accessible to the entire interior design industry.

This means that retailers, planners, architects and customers have access to free, complete, up-to-date and flawless data sets on a single compatible platform that guarantees secure processes. All data is provided in standard planning formats.

With this, Walter K. is putting itself right at the forefront of the digital transformation. Every product from the portfolio, every configuration, all prices and all lists are on one platform. A platform Walter K. is single-handedly and continuously adding to. The effect is an enormous increase in efficiency – along the entire process and value chain.

This platform is open around the clock. Architects can integrate high-quality 3D models into their planning; room planners drastically shorten their processing times; retailers can focus all their attention on their customers and inspire them with fascinating configurations. And, as for the customers, they can follow, post and share every one of these steps – and even shape them. Playfully, creatively, anywhere in the world.

## WOW YOUR CUSTOMERS!

Retailers can reap lots of benefits from the digital planning office



### MAXIMIZING SPACE

Turning shelves into showrooms

**BEFORE** Catalogs, price lists and updates: it is not unusual for dealer's shelves to be filled with several feet of binders per furniture manufacturer they carry. This collection of documents not only needs to be stored somewhere – it also needs to be maintained and regularly updated.

**NOW** There is a central database with all products, configurations and prices. The output of the database is platform-independent, which means that it works on desktop PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones. Data is managed and updated regularly. That is how shelf space can be transformed into showroom space.



### PACKING LIGHT

An entire product library in your pocket

**BEFORE** Catalogs and price lists not only take up space, they are also heavy. This can be a problem during on-site meetings with customers since a number of their questions cannot be answered.

**NOW** A mid-sized phone or tablet weighs less than one pound. The screen produces well-illuminated crystal-clear images, is very easy to use – and the device can access all important information, figures, dimensions, data, pictures, prices and lists.



### INVOKING THE SENSES

Experience variety with the latest technology

**BEFORE** Using furniture is a sensory experience – so selecting it should be too. Furniture needs to be touched and, at the same time, seen up close and in context. Showrooms and print catalogs are helpful but not capable of presenting all the possible configurations

**NOW** Zoom in on details, experience augmented reality first-hand, all on screens with 4K resolution – this is sure to provide the wow factor. You can run through each and every product variant. And furniture, materials and upholstery fabrics can be viewed as high-resolution 3D images, from the finest velvet cover to oak cigar veneer. The best part? Each configuration can be saved in presentation format and sent via email.



### AVAILABLE 24/7

Creating configurations instantly

**BEFORE** No furniture purchase is the same, regardless of the scale or price class: customer requests, configurations and materials can change continuously, as can the combination of products. The more varied the configuration options, the longer it takes and more complicated it is to find answers.

**NOW** Complexity is not a problem anymore – it turns into variety! The customer's ideas can be answered right away. Thanks to high levels of speed, functionality and data quality the cumbersome manual configuration process turns into a dynamic kind of entertainment.



### CLARITY FOR CONFIGURATIONS

"Sorry, we can't do that" will soon be a phrase of the past

**BEFORE** Walter K. offers its project partners a diverse portfolio with a near-endless number of configurations. Unfortunately this can also lead to errors and may require readjustment.

**NOW** The advantage of digitization is that products are always uniquely and unmistakably configured.

## THE WIN-WIN CHAIN

A platform everyone can benefit from

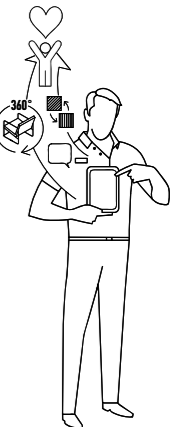


### Architects

receive high-quality graphics so their visualization of 3D planning designs is as true to life and scale as possible. All files are available in open formats to guarantee seamless import and export into common CAD programs. On request, the set can also include certificates and product information, so invitations to tender are always accurate. All data is available 24/7, and always up-to-date.

### Dealers

can concentrate on consulting and inspiring their customers right in the store. They now become proper consultants who can provide quick and simple answers to customers' questions. They impress customers by highlighting 3D models, zooming in on details, and playing around with dimensions, shapes and finishes. Even complex products can be configured playfully – directly, digitally, emotionally.



### Planners

increase the proximity to the customer. They send images, lists and CAD models directly from the planning tools. From sending a quick picture of the latest idea to showing all the available options, this new form of mobile consultation is fast and available at all times – plus it can be used anywhere and even gives the customers some mementos to take with them on their device!

### Customers

become involved in the process. People consciously and happily invest time into designing their surroundings. The digital tools turn planning into a sensory, interactive experience.

Customers can follow the progress of their furniture planning on their end devices, and share pictures and designs with families and friends. The apps are so simple and intuitive to use that customers with a special interest in design can take things into their own hands.





# “Digitality strengthens our tradition. In doing so we are renewing it.”

Markus Benz, CEO of Walter K., talking about a radical step and about what the change is bringing to partners, retailers and customers

Mr. Benz, will robots soon be building your furniture?

MB (laughs) A lot of water will flow under the bridge until machines are capable of doing that. Our profession has a lot to do with experience. The elasticity of fabrics changes from batch to batch. Leather and wood are living materials. We feel the differences during manufacture, and even them out. Only we humans can give the product its sculptural quality.

What does digitalization mean for Walter K.?

MB Change. Walter K. is all about years of tradition, perfection and craftsmanship. It may sound contradictory at first. But if we approach digitalization correctly, we can strengthen this tradition further, because we are renewing it. We are checking every component of our communication: when, where and with what content do we meet customers on their journey to making a decision? Within the company we are reviewing all processes: the whole organization is being digitalized – so that our internal processes and results correspond to the requirements which are dictated to us from outside. We are going to get better, faster and leaner.

Internal digitalization versus external? Could you explain that please?

MB Consumers are spending a lot more time using digital channels to find out about products. Website and social media activities have to be state of the art. If you look at our business partners, their degree of digitalization is also high: planners, architects and dealers are constantly requiring data sets, pictures and digital price lists for their projects. We are now taking a really radical step. All content and processes are now running on one platform. Pictures, data sets, configurations, price lists, offer management, merchandise planning and control systems. Everything is harmonized.

Being that consequent must have increased your efficiency the most.

MB Our efficiency – and that of our partners! Our strategy is based on an open industrial standard. So we haven't just created a solution for Walter K. Our partners are part of our digitalization and benefit equally from it. All data sets are available 24/7 in the relevant programs for the dealers, planners and architects – without any gaps, in a transparent form, in top resolution. Just imagine how this harmonization of the data accelerates the processes.

Got an example?

MB Well, a process that used to take weeks, can now be taken care of in just hours.

Now we have lost sight of the customers...

MB Exactly the opposite is true! Because this strategy generates even more fascination, experience and involvement for the customer.

How does that work?

MB We are not just talking about merchandise planning and ordering systems. We have opted for software that helps us to create an unforgettable customer experience because it was developed to plan rooms and configure furniture. Walter K. only hands over complete and top quality data sets. The customer at the dealer's can then configure his interior, his furniture together with the advisor – without having to wait but with a definite wow effect. The products, surfaces, upholstery and materials are in a quality never seen before. This results in a completely new kind of selling and planning result. And at the same time, the software has been integrated in our business processes.

Can customers control this configuration themselves?

MB Of course they can! The dealer can send the configuration to the customer who then actually can continue to work on it with an app on his smartphone or tablet. The customer can take photos of his floor at home, scan and configure a room plan. And if he wants, he can send that to the dealer. Even by WhatsApp or as an SMS if he wants to.

Does that all work in virtual reality and augmented reality environments?

MB Yes. At Orgatec we will be presenting an AR application for the apps. The launch of further features is definitely just a question of time.

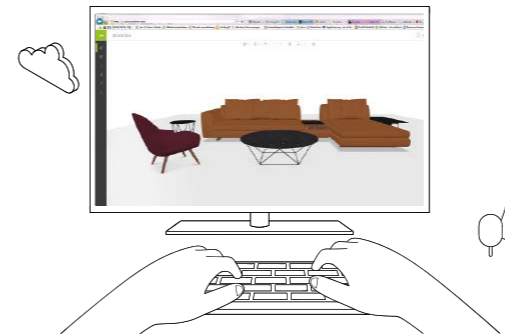
So what do you need dealers for?

MB People want to feel and try out high-quality products when making a purchasing decision. Planning and consultancy is still the retailer's largest talent and competency. Our digital excellence – only the best data for the best customer experience – strengthens the retailer's position and prepares them for the future. First of all, they have the time to focus entirely on the customer and, secondly, they can capture the customer's imagination with new, digital forms of presentation and win them over.

Interview: Ralf Grauel

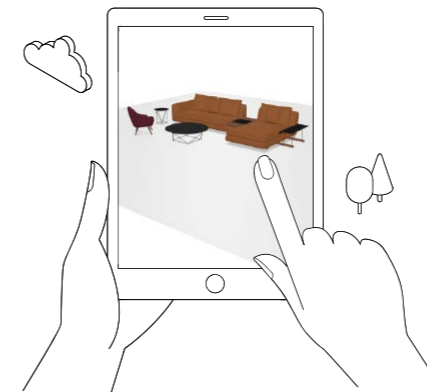
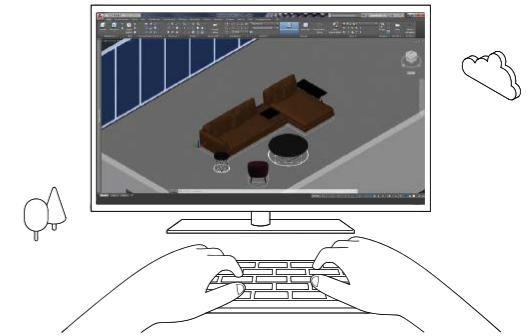
## DIGITAL CONFIGURATIONS

How architects, customers and dealers communicate seamlessly with each other via smartphones, tablets and PCs. An example



**1. THE PLANNER AT THE ARCHITECTURAL FIRM** configures a furniture setting from Walter K. in the pCon.box. He exports a CAD file for his architect and an open exchange format for the retailer (OBK file). The customer receives an image as well as a product list of the configuration.

**2. THE ARCHITECT** integrates the furniture configuration into the larger plan and exports a file to the customer.



**3. THE CLIENT** receives the image – accompanied by the article list of his configuration.



**4. THE DEALER** receives the OBK file. He exports the product list, places the customer's order internally and forwards it along with other orders to Walter K. in Herrenberg. There are no further questions. The production process is initiated on the very same day.

# The sculpture for visionaries

**TAMA DESK.** Design: EOOS.

*Tama* is applied art. Sculpture, statement, commitment. To freedom and creativity, elegance and beauty, sensuousness and self-esteem.

*Tama Desk* is more of an attitude than a desk. If you sit behind it, you send your thoughts on a journey over the blue ocean of new markets and opportunities







Pedestal and drawer exude masterly craftsmanship. A light brush of your hand along the body and the corpus slides out, revealing an inner tray lined with soft leather and mirrors. A private compartment available with lighting if required.

Its design is a song of wood and craftsmanship. Bronze blade legs, elegant lines and terraced levels. *Tama Desk* marks the evolution from workbench to instrument.



The perfectly balanced form of *Tama Desk*, every detail, its finish, the charm of the surfaces and its subtle poise – all these aspects bring a fourth dimension to the category desk: creativity!

*Tama Desk* is a mind space. The redefinition of the desk as a think desk. A balancing act of dynamism and calm, shape and sensuousness. A sound board for the ideas of those sitting at it: managers, doers and all those people who look to the future because they know that that is where success is shaped.

- Iconic character
- Craftsmanship par excellence
- Interplay of horizontal and vertical surfaces



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator



A new vacuum procedure was used to apply the veneer to desk top, sides and curves

### The design story

How do you rethink the desk? How do you shape a haven of inspiration – a place that gives birth to ideas? Is there a design which can help us to think in new categories? In other words, what does a desk have to look like to literally make it its owner's think tank? It should certainly be organic because nature doesn't have any right angles either. For years now, EOOS has worked with the vital interplay of vertical and horizontal surfaces. *Tama Desk* is the culmination of this constructive exploration. A balancing act of lightness and strength, simplicity and complexity, dynamism, calm, shape and sensuousness. Pure inspiration! This truly unique furnishing sculpture only became possible with the craftsmanship of the Walter K. development team which came up with a range of completely new construction and veneer technologies for *Tama Desk*. Clemens Schmidt, developer: "*Tama Desk* is in no way like the construction of a typical model – maybe apart from the fact that it has a drawer."

### Facts and details

- **Craftsmanship** at its best.
- **Three discs** carry the desk.
- **New nutwood maduro** and all other veneers possible.
- **Pedestal** with pullout.
- **Private compartment:** leather lining, mirrors and as an optional extra lighting in the drawer and pedestal.
- **USB power ports:** concealed charging stations for iPhone and iPad.
- **Invisible** cable routing.

### Design: EOOS.

The Austrian designers Martin Bergmann, Gernot Bohmann and Harald Gründl run their atelier in Vienna and work in projects from Milan to Toronto, London to New York, Berlin to Herrenberg. EOOS draws on the archaic and creates visionary pieces. They observe human rituals, sense desires and instincts, and design furniture to suit life.



*"This desk is organic through and through. It is different from all other desks before it. Brilliant. The question is: can you actually still call it a desk?"*

JÜRGEN RÖHM Head of Research and Development at Walter K.

# A table like a made-to- measure suit

**SCALE-MEDIA.** Design: Wolfgang C. R. Mezger.

It is the master of the boardroom. German engineering combined with perfect craftsmanship. The design options of *Scale-Media* in terms of size, material and media technology are so diverse that every table is ultimately unique – and the icing on the cake for every corporate identity



*Scale-Media* is the made-to-measure suit among the conference tables. Flexibility with character. The design team at Walter K. implements high-grade components to ensure the perfect fit for the most demanding of customer desires. Every individual piece stands for unrivalled excellence in scaling, processing and finishing. *Scale-Media* is a powerful tool for modern leadership. Ensuring that the company – with its aims, its values and its identity – is the focal point of a discussion.

- New boat form with rounded corners
- New veneer in oak cigar
- New panel leg with soft radii



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

The development of *Scale-Media* is the story of years of collaboration with conferencing customers the world over. It all started with the question: how can you develop a conference table to suit the highest demands but which, like a made-to-measure suit, can nevertheless be adapted to suit individual wishes and, at the same time, is based on established construction principles? This is why *Scale-Media* was designed as an intelligent toolkit from the outset. It is based on process-related manufacturing engineering, is variable in size and look, and characterized by excellence in material and the integration of media technology. In a continuous improvement process, every made-to-measure table enriches the design team's treasure trove of experience – and leads to unrivalled expertise in scaling, flexibility and finishing. Challenging customer desires have made *Scale-Media* the perfect tool for boardrooms.

### Facts and details

- **Dimensions** are scalable.
- **Resolute excellence** in material and surfaces: veneers, fine textured paint and Fenix®.
- **Central section** made of leather.
- **Connectors** for media technology are discreetly positioned under the surface.
- **Connector covers** in the table top are also veneered.

### Design: Wolfgang C. R. Mezger.

With his good sense for the spirit of the times, he has been one of the pioneers in office design for more than thirty years. Wolfgang C. R. Mezger is a typographer, industrial designer and specialist for executive offices. He finds answers to complex questions in simple solutions and consistent details.



Boat-shaped table top with rounded corners, veneer in oak cigar. Panel legs with soft radii in fine textured paint black. Central section made of leather



Boat-shaped table top with rounded corners, veneer in wengé. Solid base in fine textured paint mineral



Boat-shaped table top, veneer in oak shining grey. Prism panel legs in fine textured paint anthracite



Trapeze-shaped table top with rounded corners in fine textured paint taupe. Panel legs in fine textured paint bronze

# The agile table system

**CONFERENCE-X.** Design: EOOO.

Beauty, efficiency and stability – crossed with maximum flexibility. The elegant X-shaped base carries the slim, almost sensuous top. A table that is so airy that it liberates the room instead of dominating it





Working worlds are becoming more diverse, rooms more variable in use. The new elongated X base enables conference tables up to 1.40 meters wide. People can sit opposite each other and work together at one and the same table – with or without a computer. If a new situation arises, the system can be dismantled or converted in a flash



*Conference-X* is also a perfect individual working place. The airy X-shaped legs lend an air of lightness. The table is stable and provides plenty of legroom



Today an individual workplace, tomorrow a bench for a brainstorming session, the day after a series of tables for a seminar. *Conference-X* is easy to convert and dismantle in seconds – without any special knowledge, without tools. And it is precisely this flexibility that makes *Conference-X* a modern management table for start-ups, fin-techs and agencies. Scalable and adaptable: a table which grows with the ideas of the people sitting round it.



Beauty and stability made of solid aluminum. The slimline X carries tops up to one meter wide. The new, elongated X can shoulder areas up to 1.40m wide



*“The secret is the X: a leg made of 60 individual parts with a powerful spring lock. Could withstand earthquakes – the more you rock the table, the firmer the base is locked.”*

**RAINER BRINKMANN** Construction engineer at Walter K.

- Flexibility and agility in the office
- Elegant supporting structure
- No-tool assembly



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

Rooms are becoming more variable in use. What does a table that satisfies a whole range of different demands look like – from the individual workplace to an international symposium? That combines beauty and multifunctionality? That can be converted in a flash? Bearing these questions in mind, designers and construction engineers came up with the high-grade *Conference-X* system. The pivotal piece is an X-shaped base made of solid aluminum – elegant, lightweight with a high load-bearing capacity. People have plenty of legroom and the table top is stable. The newly created connecting mechanism can be locked and released in a flash.

Now the X has a big brother: an elongated X that can shoulder working spaces up to 1.40 meters wide. People can sit opposite each other and work together at one and the same table – with or without a computer. If a new task crops up, the system can be converted in a flash. *Conference-X* is the flexible table system for flexible companies. A construction which combines agility with stability.

### Facts and details

- **Table top** in multiple shapes and sizes, materials and surfaces.
- **Rounded edges** for sophisticated requirements, straight edges for the business area.
- **The X is the base.** It carries the table top. And connects two tables.
- **Easy Handle connection technology** has been put forward for a patent.
- **Connectors** in the table top provide access to power and IT networks.
- **Textile cable mesh** bundles cables and small pieces of media equipment.
- **USB power port** for charging smart-phones and tablets is virtually invisible under the table edge.
- **Modesty panel** with a textile look provides visual protection and absorbs sound in a room.



1



2



3



4

From a technical point of view *Conference-X* is a table system. (1) The pivotal piece is an X-shaped base made of solid aluminum – elegant, lightweight with a high load-bearing capacity. (2) The newly created connecting mechanism can be released in a flash, (3) and quickly used to connect two table tops. (4) The joint is virtually invisible



# Light now even lighter

LIZ-M. Design: Claudio Bellini.

*Liz*, has a ring of beauty to it, but also sounds like 'less'. And with that, the secret to this pure chair is aired. And its new variant, *Liz-M*, goes even one step further when it comes to sticking to essentials

*Liz-M* means: less is more. More minimalism, more lightness – in construction, upholstery and handling. Maximum comfort with a minimum weight. *Liz-M* is versatile: for flexible use round a conference table, at events, congresses, lectures. And *Liz-M* makes sense: its design demonstrates resolute reserve in the use of material. The result is a chair of maximum sustainability – because its reduced components are perfect in terms of separation and recycling.



*Liz-M* is light and narrow: it is easy to stack up to twelve chairs safely



1



2

Flexible and comfortable: (1) linked in a row or (2) free-standing – comfy with a pad on the armrest

- Reduction to essentials
- Light and sustainable
- Extremely simple handling



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

Claudio Bellini had designed a new variant of *Liz* allowing the safe stacking of up to twelve chairs. The construction engineers at Walter K. also asked themselves: how could they make this variant even lighter – in terms of weight, in terms of construction, while retaining maximum comfort? The solution? A new kind of knitted fabric. It has outstanding elasticity, which can be varied with the density of the loops. Different colored, twisted yarns give the surface a vital, three-dimensional effect. And it feels fantastic to the touch. The team came up with a construction technology as simple as it is ingenious: they pulled the circular-knitted fabric over the framework in one piece – like a stocking. Armrest and seating area, cover and cushioning – all made of the same material. And that is the reason why the chair is so wonderful to separate and recycle. *Liz-M* is the comfort champion among the conference chairs.

### Facts and details

- **The knitted fabric** is a new kind of cover and substrate in one. It is elastic, breathable and particularly easy to care for.
- **The armrest pad** ensures extra comfort.
- **The tubular steel framework** makes it easy to stack and set up in rows.
- **All components** can be separated and recycled.

Design: Claudio Bellini.

The Italian designer has a studio in Milan and lectures in industrial design at the University of Genoa. The impulse of his work is the question of how new technologies can lead to new shapes. Many of Claudio Bellini's creations have won international prizes, including the chair *Liz*, which also received the Red Dot Award in 2013.



*Liz-M* features a new kind of knitted fabric (left), but is also available in all other fabrics and leathers in the Walter K. collection



*“As a team we came up with a solution: why don't we pull a cover over Liz-M like you would a stocking? And that was it. Very simple and absolutely ingenious.”*

OLIVER SIEGELIN Team Lead Development at Walter K.



# Talking on a level playing field

DEEN. Design: EOOS.

A place that attracts you. A surface that wants to be touched. At a height that is just right. With a shape that is clear and open. Meetings at a standing height table are always meetings that need no hierarchy

At the standing height table *Deen*, there is no difference between those standing and sitting. If you are already standing there, you have everything in view; if you are joining the group, you immediately feel welcome; and if you have to leave in the middle, you certainly don't cause a commotion. Meetings at *Deen* are encounters. The soft edge is inviting. The solid wood top, that looks like a tree trunk, exudes warmth, dignity and respect. And this is how special moments occur in public spaces, an office and at home.



1



2

The table top of *Deen* is available in two designs:  
 (1) "Advanced" with a rounded edge and surfaces such as fine textured paint, Fenix® and others.  
 (2) And made of solid wood with a soft edge

- Masterpiece made of solid wood
- Superiority, overview, guiding principle
- Meetings on a level playing field
- Multiple hand-crafted details



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

A standing height table promotes open, dynamic exchange. That was something the designers from EOOS knew, and they also knew: height alone is not enough. The design should have a positive effect on those standing round the table. The table should feel pleasant. Sophistication was the core message, decided EOOS and Walter K. They chose elegant solid wood for the top, mount and legs. The uniform, velvety oiled surface exudes a sense of calm. The radii of the boat-shaped top look harmonious. Those standing round the table come closer together thanks to the slimline form. The perfectly shaped soft edge sweet-talks your hand. The elegant legs look natural. The product is top-class, vital and relaxed through and through. And that is why *Deen* not only looks good in executive offices and creative rooms, but also in a bistro or your kitchen at home. The perfect meeting point.

### Facts and details

- **Sculptural table top** made of solid wood or with surfaces such as fine textured paint, Fenix® and others.
- **USB power port**, connectors and cable outlet are available as an optional extra.
- **The soft edge** feels pleasantly soft.
- **The legs** are always made of solid wood.



Variety: *Deen* comes in two heights. The difference between them is ten centimeters – for different markets, preferences and situations. The table top comes in several sizes



*"I like meetings that take place at eye level, literally. Deen is the perfect masterpiece. Hand-crafted, high grade. An attractive standing height table I like to lean on."*

RAINER BRINKMANN Construction engineer at Walter K.



# Oasis in open space

**JAAN SILENT.** Design: EOOS.

Ground and air. Strength and lightness. Volume and clean lines. Comfortable upholstery floating over understated legs. Distinction with discretion. The best of both worlds



Distinction and discretion: high, lightweight screens frame *Jaan Silent*. The soft surface of the screen is protective and banishes disturbing noises. The screens come in various forms: semi- or fully closed, in an L or U shape, as shown on the previous page – resulting in tailored privacy

Closed quarters in an open office. *Jaan Silent* creates private islands: in a workspace, a lounge or at an airport. Everywhere we live, work, travel and are on the move, *Jaan Silent* structures space, issuing fine invitations – for a spontaneous get-together in a small team, a creative session or quite simply five minutes of ‘me’ time.



1



2

Tailored privacy: (1) on the *Jaan Silent* sofa with soft upholstery and a particularly comfortable seating space. (2) Or on the *Jaan Silent* bench with formal upholstery



Functional details: the leather-covered brackets ooze craftsmanship and hold the filigree screens of *Jaan Silent* together

- Rooms within a room
- Tailored privacy
- A retreat for concentration and communication
- Delicate design with distinguished details



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

The more open the design of our working worlds and public areas, the more significant areas of retreat become. A sofa and a bench were to be designed for *Jaan Silent* that would give maximum privacy – without overloading a room. The solution consists of screens with a new kind of construction made of fine upholstery, laminated wood and aluminum. *Jaan Silent* was developed entirely with a focus on its use. The system is flexible, extendible and can be combined individually. The *Jaan Silent* sofa with light, soft upholstery and a comfortable seating space. The *Jaan Silent* bench with formal upholstery and more compact dimensions. The backs and sides of the screens come in different lengths and depths, making it possible to realize private U shapes, semi-open L shapes or large open room dividers. This results in a private space in an open office. The best of both worlds.

### Facts and details

- **The screens come in various forms.** Semi- or fully closed, in a U or L shape.
- **The decorative seam** lends the screen optical depth and emphasizes the hand-crafted style.
- **Electricity and USB connectors** ensure nobody will run out of power here.
- **Can be combined with *Oki* and *Oki Tablet*** – any scenario can be created with the delicate occasional tables, whether with a laptop, over lunch or in a short pep talk.

### Partner in style

With its delicate wire framework *Oki Tablet* is the perfect occasional table for *Jaan Silent*. The table was specially created to hold a laptop or a tablet. The table top can be tilted – for stylish working in both private and public workspaces. Design: EOOS.



“I imagine somebody approaching the furniture because they feel attracted to it, to the material and its surface. This moment should be filled with awe.”

ELMAR BÖING Development upholsterer at Walter K.



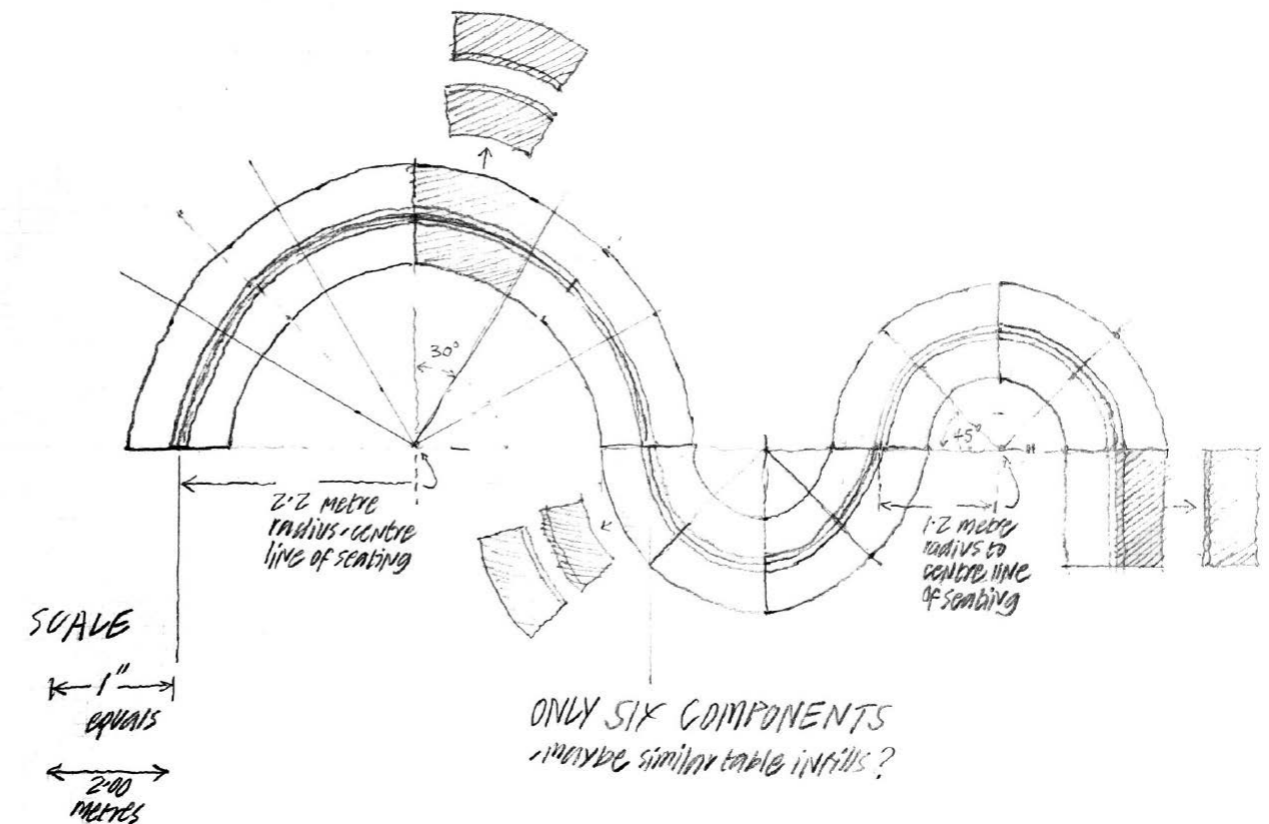
# The upholstered kit

**FOSTER 620.** Design: Norman Foster.

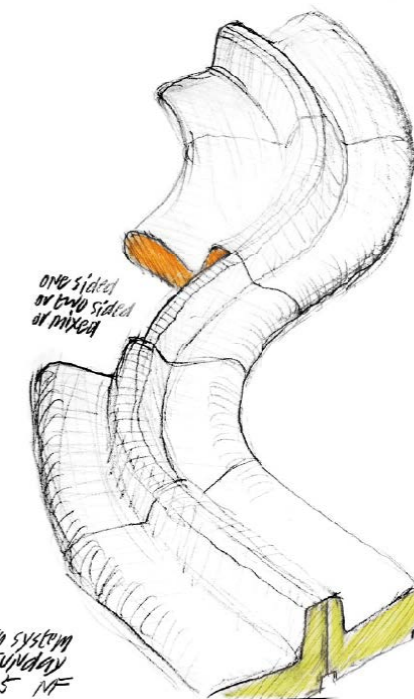
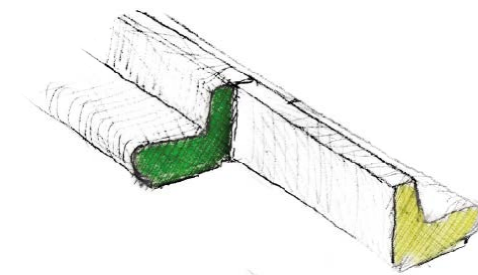
*Foster 620* comprises six seating sections that can be interchangeably combined to create different layouts. It features a straight section, a semi-circular end segment, and two types of curved elements – a compact and a lazy curve, which can be adapted to any setting



Designed by architect Norman Foster, the *Foster 620* is designed to bring people together in an informal setting for group discussions or as individual seats, and can be part of any lobby, waiting room or lounge space. Its flexibility allows it to become part of a dynamic environment and respond to changing needs of any organization. Each element has a short backrest and a generous seat, which are supported by thin blade-like legs that almost disappear under the seat, as it appears to float effortlessly. Timber tables with tops matt powder-coated black or bronze, or lacquered in copper complete the ensemble.



Straights, compact curves and lazy curves: an ingenious system connects the benches either side panel to side panel or back to back. *Foster 620* is a playful, high-grade upholstered bench system for shaping movement and calm in urban spaces (sketches by Norman Foster)



Chatting on the finest leather: Norman Foster (right) and Walter K. CEO Markus Benz on a prototype of *Foster 620* in the architect's London studio

- System that brings people together
- Fascinating proportions, flowing lines
- Countless layouts for dynamic environments



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

## The design story

How can architecture be complemented by furnishings? How can a piece of furniture, like a building in a city, steer the flow of human movement? This was the question British architect Norman Foster, who has collaborated with Walter K. for two decades now, set out to resolve when he started developing the upholstered bench system *Foster 620*. Used for the first time in London, in the European headquarters of the Bloomberg media group, and in Philadelphia, at a leading US cable network operator's offices, the modularity of the upholstered sections makes it possible to create a customized sculptural seating solution suited to a variety of different spaces. An ingenious system connects the benches either side panel to side panel or back to back. The upholstered configurations appear to float, carried by set-back blade-like legs. The specifics of craftsmanship, such as the long decorative seams and drawn-in details, underscore the sophistication and the bench's dynamic effect. The covers are available in leather or fabric, with the option of built-in USB charging ports to support flexible working.

## Facts and details

- **Six seating sections** make up the upholstered bench.
- **All sections** are available as end and intermediate elements.
- **Exquisite leather**, finished by hand.
- **Firm upholstery**, providing the perfect balance for your body.
- **USB power ports** can be integrated if required.

## Design: Norman Foster.

British architect Norman Foster is one of the most successful architects of our time. With his studio Foster + Partners, he has constructed a number of buildings all over the world, including public buildings such as airport terminals, town halls, subway stations, bridges, museums and sports stadia. Notable icons are the Millennium Bridge and 30 St Mary Axe in London, the Apple Park in California and the Reichstag Building in Berlin. It was the furnishing of the latter that saw the start of the collaboration between Norman Foster and Walter K. Since then, they have created several programs together illustrating the synthesis of architecture and furnishings.



1



2

Six sections, interchangeably combinable:  
(1) side to side for a lazy curve,  
(2) back to back with compact curves



1



2



3

Very best of craftsmanship:  
(1) nutwood with bronze-colored top,  
(2) oak with copper-colored top,  
(3) oak with black top

## Foster 620 Table

The occasional table seems to have taken root, and is thus the perfect complement for the sweeping dynamism of the *Foster 620* upholstered bench system. *Foster 620 Table* was also designed by Norman Foster. The leg is made of timber in oak or nutwood, with a velvety soft surface. The table top is matt powder-coated black or bronze, or lacquered in copper



*“The bench looks like a long meandering river poured out into a room. And that is why it is important that the joining and folded seams keep a linear form and support the movement.”*

JULIA SCHROEDER Seamstress in the Development Department at Walter K.

# Screens for all shapes

**FOSTER 512.** Design: Foster + Partners.

Bold lines and curves in space. *Foster 512* can be easily adapted and scaled to suit lobbies and airports, museums and galleries, showrooms and shops



As well as pre-defined modules, *Foster 512* has an innovative frame construction which allows for bespoke configurations. It supports multiple – almost infinite – seating configurations, with different levels of enclosure for groups and individuals, and is available in a range of materials and finishes. There could not be a more discreet invitation – to reflect, read and work, or simply relax.



The screens for *Foster 512* have either leather or fabric covers, they are fastened to the seat with brackets

- Elegant upholstered cube
- Beauty of symmetry
- Screens for a whole world of shapes



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

### The design story

Agility is the result of the dynamic interplay of communication and concentration, sharing and privacy. The architects from Foster + Partners wanted to underscore this balance in large spaces such as airports and lobbies. They developed complementary screens for the existing *Foster 512* upholstered benches. Whether curvaceous or linear, they make it possible to divide a room in a number of ways – offering an individual niche for those in search of peace and quiet.

### Facts and details

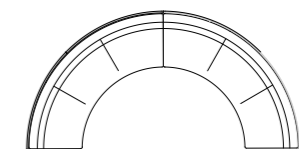
- **Diverse shapes** for the architectures of lobbies and airports, museums and galleries, showrooms and shops.
- The **symmetry** of the lines pervades the upholstery, the drawn-in sections and framework.
- **Aluminum blade legs** carry the bench.
- **The seat with micro-compartment spring core** ensures maximum comfort.
- The **screen** resolutely continues the fundamental shape – whether straight or curved.

### Design: Foster + Partners.

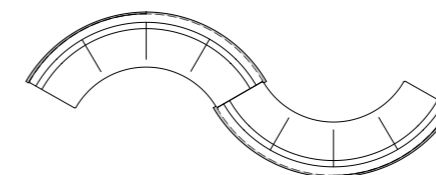
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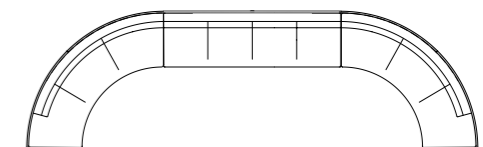
1



2



3



4

*Foster 512* can be straight or curved. Various elements can be combined, creating a range of individual landscapes. The new screen suits all shapes with a backrest: for example (1) the linear variant, (2) the semicircle, (3) the lazy curve and (4) the bracket shape

# Icon in the comfort zone

**FK.** Design: Preben Fabricius & Jørgen Kastholm.

The *FK* bucket seat is international design history, a beacon of modernity. The fine lines and clear contours are as compelling today as they ever were. The new soft upholstery is as reticent as it is effective, underscoring both the lines and the coziness. The perfect sketch, supplemented with long-lasting comfort



- Unique pieces, minimalistic form
- Understated, additional upholstery



pCon.box

Find out more in the configurator

## The design story

Nobody needs to worry about the success of the *FK* family. Since the 1960s, members of the *FK* family have been welcomed all over in top-quality, stylish interiors – as a soloist, in compositions or as a complement for sofa and lounge groups. The developers rose to the challenge. Would it be possible to model softer upholstery into the seating area?

## Facts and details

- **The bucket** is completely covered with soft leather.
- **The seat** swivels.

## Design: Preben Fabricius & Jørgen Kastholm.

Inspired by functionalism and the resoluteness of Scandinavian design, interior designers Preben Fabricius and Jørgen Kastholm founded their atelier in 1961 – an atelier that was to produce icons of furniture history. Their main concern was to state the function of an aesthetic form. The *FK* bucket seat, designed by Fabricius and Kastholm, symbolizes classical design, and is as timeless as it is modern. It won the very first German prize for “Good Shape” (“Gute Form”) in 1969.



The armrests of *FK* seem to be beckoning – inviting us with open arms. The bucket provides ample protection, the leather oozes warmth and comfort



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