

für Haus Lemke



Liebe Freunde von Haus Lemke,

bei meinem Besuch in ihrem fantastischen Haus habe ich einige Ihrer wunderschönen Kataloge erworben und war von Ihrem Ausstellungsprogramm beeindruckt. Darüber hinaus ist LMvdR für mich als Architekt selbstverständlich eine ständige Inspirationsquelle. Aus Respekt und als Dialog habe ich eine Reihe von Collagen von einem Besuch an Haus Lemke von einigen von mir entworfenen Prototypen erstellt. Daraus wurde eine Ausstellung zum "Architektenmöbel".

das Architektenmöbel

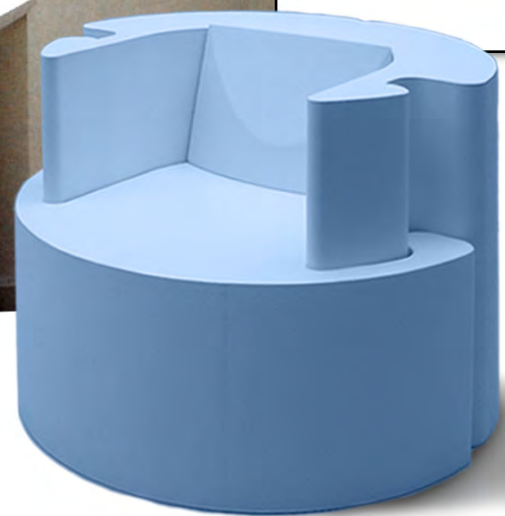
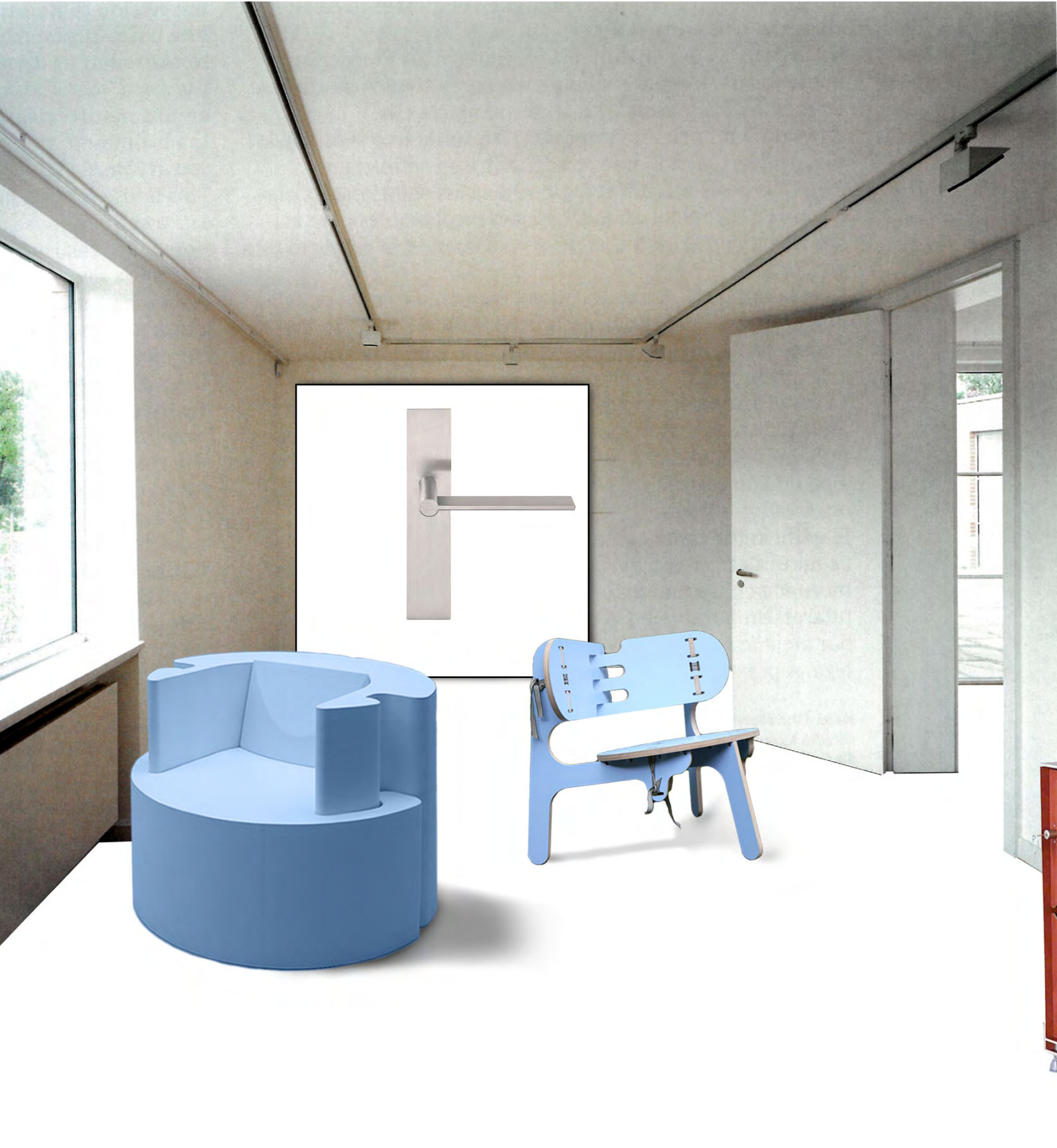
Als das Haus Lemke gebaut wurde, waren es die Architekten (wie Ludwig Mies, oft zusammen mit Lily Reich), die mit ihren „Architektenmöbeln“ den Grundstein für die Entwicklung unserer heutigen Möbelindustrie legten. Während des Wiederaufbaus nahm die Massenproduktion zu und Produktdesign wurde zum Beruf, was mittlerweile zu einem Übermaß an irreführendem Formenfetischismus und umweltschädlichem Konsumismus geführt hat.

Kehren wir zu den „Architektenmöbeln“ zurück, die um die vorletzte Jahrhundertwende entworfen wurden, da viele der heutigen Entwürfe auf diese früheren Entwürfe zurückgreifen. In der Zwischenzeit warten wir auf die Verfügbarkeit anderer Rohstoffe und / oder Produktionstechniken; hoffentlich anderes Kaufverhalten.

In jedem Fall beginnt eine andere und weniger umweltschädliche Art des Konsums mit einer hohen Bewertung jedes einzelnen Artikels. Es hilft dabei, wenn ein Objekt etwas Einzigartiges haben kann. Aktuelle Produktionstechniken scheinen diese Einzigartigkeit erschwinglich und damit möglich zu machen.

Ich hoffe, dass wir eine Steigerung des emotionalen Werts unserer Dinge erreichen können und dass die von mir entworfenen Möbelprototypen dabei helfen können.

Maastricht 2024, Mathieu Bruls architect









Imagery

Of course, we agree that our city, a building and / or in general a thing will perform many practical tasks. It is not so easy for us to explain the imagery of such a thing. Perhaps because our reading above all demonstrates the personal mindset of the reader. We often block this formal reasoning by calling it rather silly taste.

Still, the underlying reasoning trend has a lot of general structure. Simply because our brains work in a similar way? Strangely, we generally seem unable to recognise and appreciate these underlying structures. Maybe because such an exposure could easily make the false promises of our overwrought consumerism banal.

So, I suppose that many trains of thought follow the same reasoning path. In addition, I don't think there are even that many structural avenues of reasoning. I would like to help identify these prototypical human modes of reasoning. That would fit in nicely with the progress we are making in the digital world, where we are supplementing the reasoning trend based on 0 and 1 with more complex structures, partly by analogy with our human reasoning ability.

By creativity I suppose we mean the ability to implement or translate a structure from one arena to serve in another using the same reasoning trend. Thus, we humans often reason with a metaphor, metaphysically or with symbolism. By doing so, we even think we can read abstract form.

In the arts, serving hardly any practical use, we believe that the image evoked gives so much more meaning than what our senses perceive. Perhaps this is even the definition of art.

Fortunately, there is room for my assumption that our deep-rooted desire for infinity forms the basis for our (physical and mental) desire to interpret beyond the sensory physical.

I hear Jacques Brel easily portray his love with a panoramic description of his city.* 1

* 1

La ville s'endormait
Et j'en oublie le nom
Sur le fleuve en amont
Un coin de ciel brûlait

forthcoming

In the near future, robots and chips will do all the tedious repetitive work. We the people will have all the time to act as a homo ludens. Perhaps to read and interpret a thing?

Imagine your household goods contain such a piece; an object for reflection. Or is it too much to ask a thing to provoke such reasoning purpose? After all, the arts always do so!

extract and compile

Those who want to read a contemporary piece of furniture might start by composing a history of our modern furniture.

Due to the lack of a large-scale professional furniture industry and specialised furniture designers, it were initially the architects with their furniture designs that set a new standard.

Their pieces were made with simple techniques of extracting and assembling. Recently available

materials, such as steel tube and plywood, proved to be the catalysts for the development of a furniture language that is still relevant today.

Contrary to what was often claimed, furniture turned out to be more than just a utensil. After all, the lifestyle the furniture pieces and associated interiors wanted to mediate gave them a lot of symbolic or metaphorical value. Imagining those pieces of furniture wanted to expose honesty; a quality difficult to objectify.

The furniture designed by these architects did not occupy the space, nor did it attract more attention than necessary. It was efficient in production and use. By now, we may ask ourselves, if such historical less-is-more may be considered as a memorable contribution to sustainability?

beat and pour

As mass production progressed, specialised production knowledge grew and the profession of the product designer became emancipated. The industry began to beat and cast with the expensive mould as a necessary intermediate investment; one which proved to be justifiable only with the production of large numbers.

This mass production increasingly seems to be an exercise in an easily tedious ornamentation and thus contributes substantially to the exhaustion of our planet. Currently, we are longing for fundamentally new eco-raw materials and possibly new production techniques.

However, I suppose it starts with more conscious consumption. Hopefully, we will achieve such behaviour partly through a principled rehabilitation of the value of our objects. The world of plenty will then have to prove on a case-by-case basis that it is necessary at all.

in the meantime

The increase in scale manufacture, which brought us so much prosperity and well-being, appears to have gone too far. Perhaps, we need to revalue the small-scale. The architect's furniture is back.

We extract and reassemble. We reuse the mouldless techniques of the past. By now this is possible with the use of up-to-date mechanical and digital support.

In the meantime, we can efficiently laser cut, 3D print or CNC (computer numerical control) mill a unique piece more economically and without the need for those large numbers.

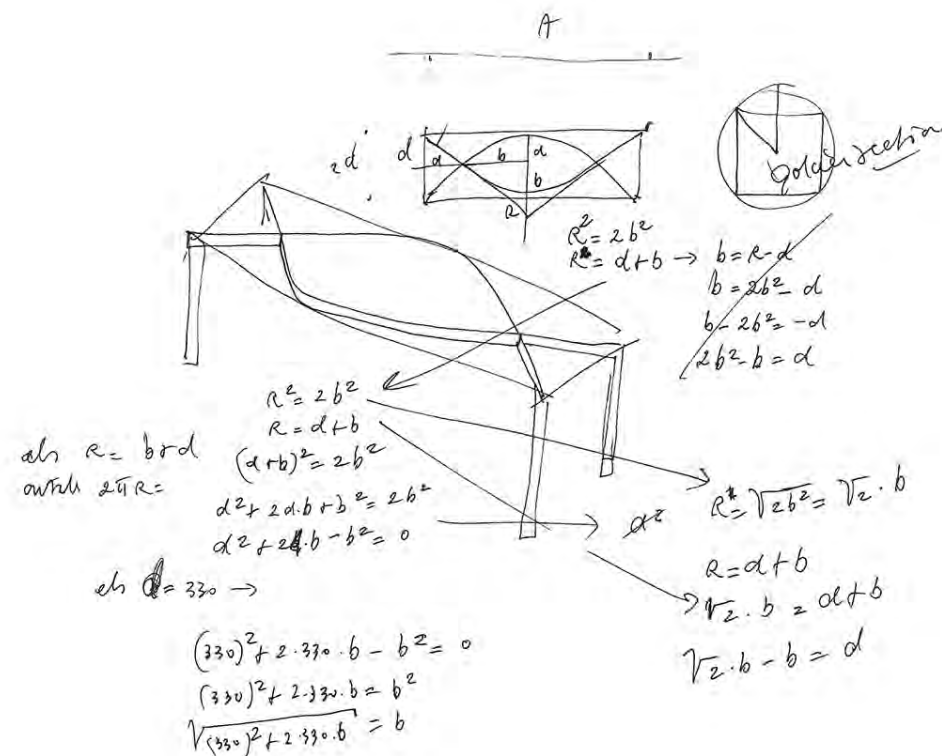
May we conclude that a limited edition can help to find the way to reflection? I hope the prototypes I design can be of help.

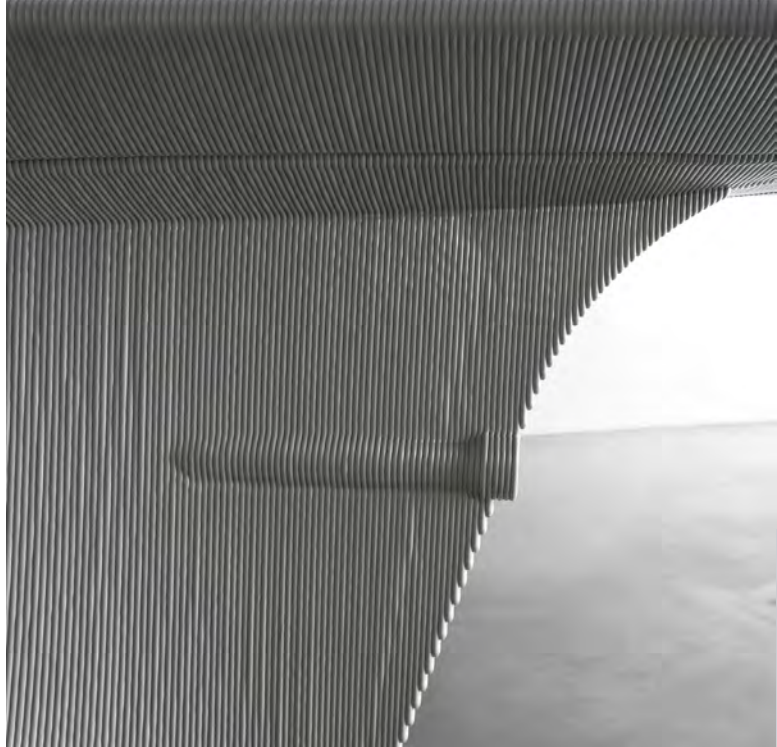
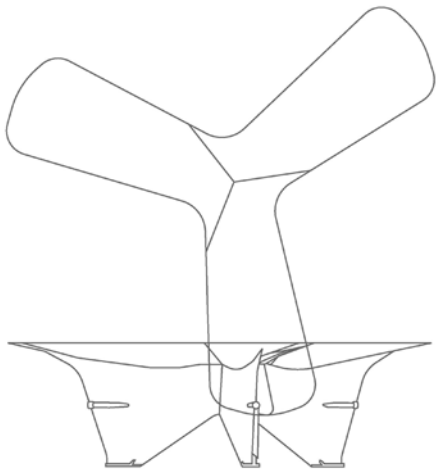
T1, für Lilly und Ludwig / table / 1986 /
 design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

Evidently, this design attempts to respond to the desire of providing maximum practical use, while using as little construction material as possible. The frame is produced by primitive bending and welding of a flat steel strip. Meanwhile, the table may be perceived as a gesture of simplicity and elegance.

While I evaluated the first prototype, I recognised the obvious similarity with the furniture that Lily Reich and Ludwig Mies van Rohe had designed. However, my sensual curved line further enriches their well-known table designs.

A fantasist might read an abstract drawing of a fish in the geometry of the frame and would want to recognise a reference to a dining table.





Propeller tafel / 2013 / in collaboration with Dirk van der Kooij /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

When I was asked to design some tables for a theatre foyer, I meant they should efficiently offer much usable surface and yet only claim a small amount of room space. The geometry of the propeller seemed an appropriate form for this. Furthermore, a table prefers to stand on three legs.

An excellent opportunity to test what is needed to manufacture such a piece of furniture with 3D printing of recycled fridge plastic as a raw material. A technique that furniture designer / artist Dirk van der Kooij has developed recently. I was lucky to be able to manufacture my design in collaboration with him.



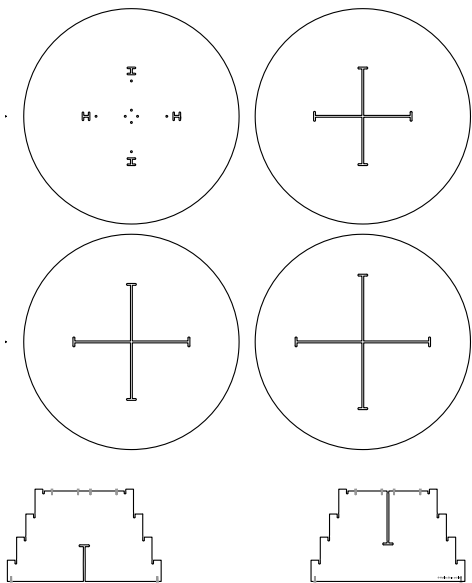
for Donald Judd / table / 2019 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of PlexiWorkShop /

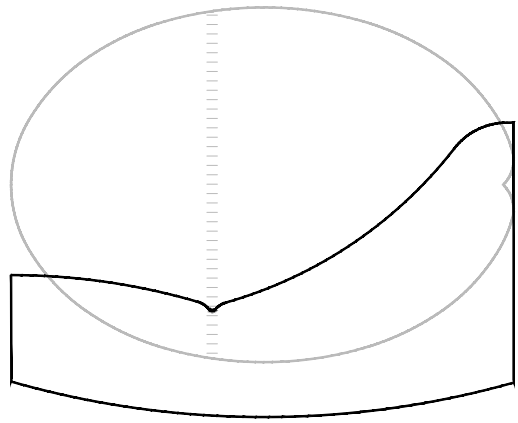
Simple, industrial, semi-finished products were used for many of the earlier Minimalist works of art, and often obtained their elevation as a work of art through repetition or stacking. Of course, they meanly reached that point of elevation through an awarded art title by a gallery or a museum.

Some artists also explored the way back as they began making furniture with the stylistic cues of their artworks, as artist and furniture maker Donald Judd did.

The table parts are laser-cut from coloured Plexiglass. The separate components are then pushed together and anchored with a few screws.

Will this very banal piece of furniture (a low table!), possibly, become a work of art and will everything then have the value that we think we can attribute to it?





RockingChair in Brancusi's studio, reconstructed in 1997

RockingChair / chair / 2008 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of RealSoftShop /

The relax chair. Simply being occupied and gazing at nothing and wanting to hear the silence in the background noise. The upper room is gently swayed to quiet places. The swing follows the cadence of your heart.

Also, an exercise for its designer in making a beautifully shaped monolith. Like Brancusi, every sculptor dreams of this; however, we all know too well how difficult that is.



for Gaudi / bench / 2018 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of CNC-workshop /

Although, during modernism we have loudly praised the (masculine?) straight line and its associated right angle, we seem to have a quiet love for the curve. We often, generally, associate the curve with femininity.

Obviously, I could feel inspired by the design curves of 'womaniser' Carlo Mollino, but I will start with Antonio Gaudi. Ironically, he remained single for life and lived his last years as a monk on the construction site of his Sagrada Familia. Gaudi's designs possess an ingenious and unique balance between emotion and ratio.

In the design for this bench, I witness a similar balance between the rational spatial construction of 2D planes and their emotional, curved contours. Keep in mind, that we can now produce those curves more than efficiently by using CNC milling.

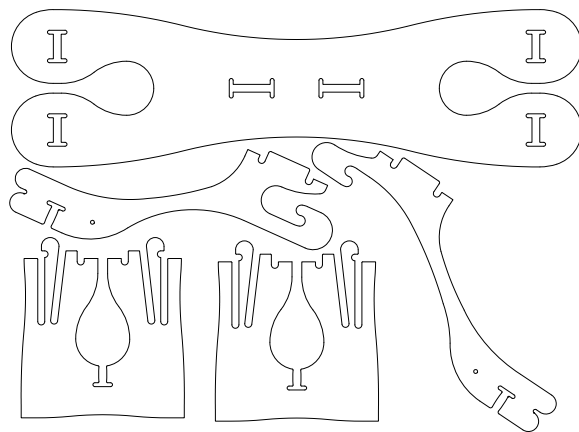
It feels perfectly natural, that we enjoy following, that wavy line with the eye or hand; like it was meant for it.

Constructing this object (optional even in solid wood and always without glue), required some testing and improvisation. Failures, due to material breakage or otherwise, are part of the process.

It remains a great mystery to me, how Gaudi was able to justify his much more dangerous failures and ditto collapses, which undoubtedly must have been there, and how he managed to motivate so many to continue.



for Gaudi in Parc Güell Barcelona,
designed in 1900 by Antonio Gaudi architect



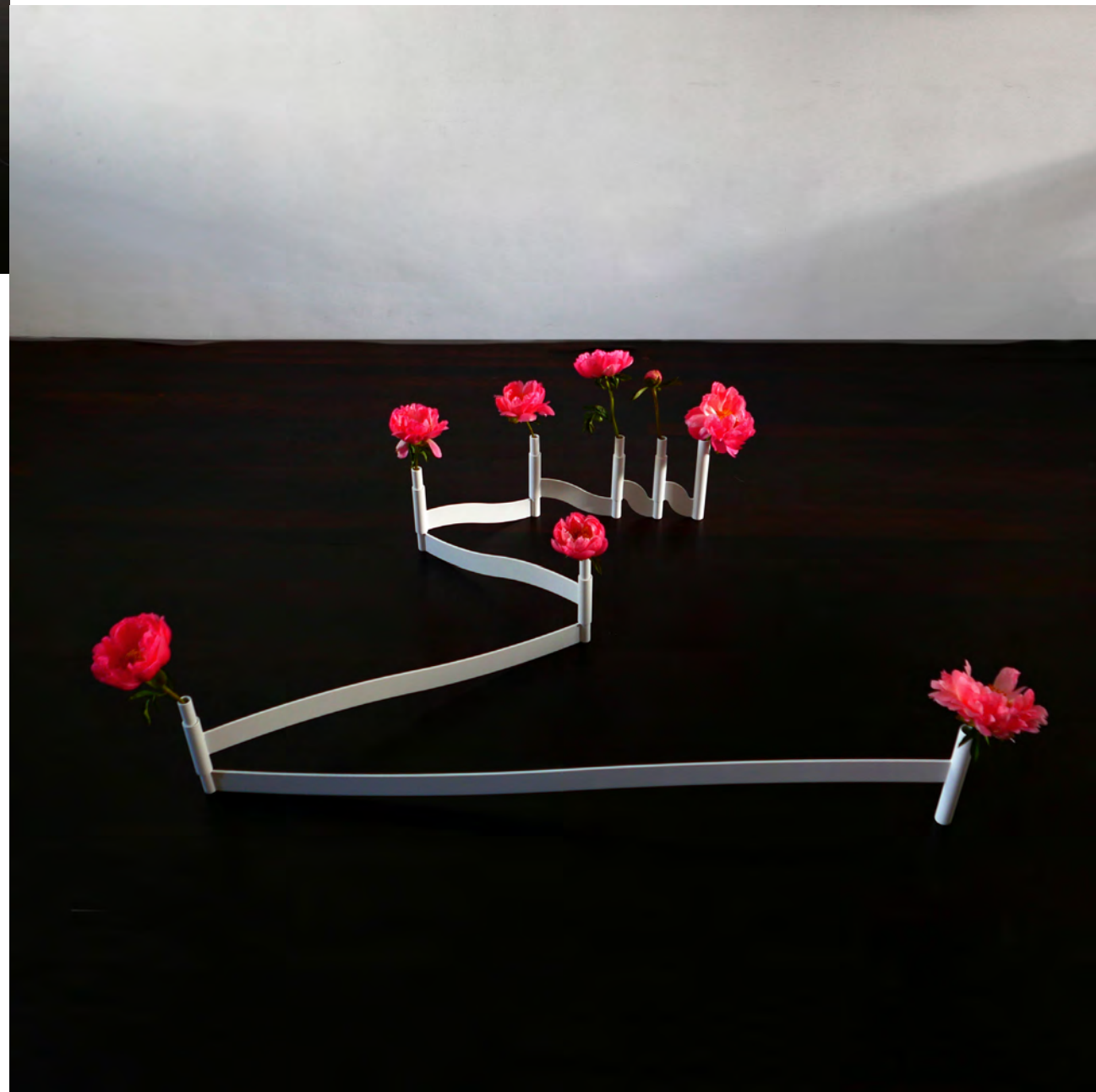


for Fibonacci / vase / 2023 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

Since the totality of energies that makes up our existence is still speeding away from its Big Bang origin, that existence is subject to constant change. We named that lively process growth.

That growth follows the most banal principle of production; the most recent is copied and stacked on top of the previous. Probably out of appreciation, we call this most natural equation form the Golden Ratio.

Around 1200, the mathematician Fibonacci used the Golden Ratio to come to his famous calculation, later known as the Fibonacci Sequence (1-1-2-3-5-8-13-21-34, etc.). And as I love the suggestive absoluteness of mathematics, I am playfully illustrating and meanwhile honouring his meaningful discovery with this vase.



for Isamu Noguchi / table/stool / 2018 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of CNC-workshop /

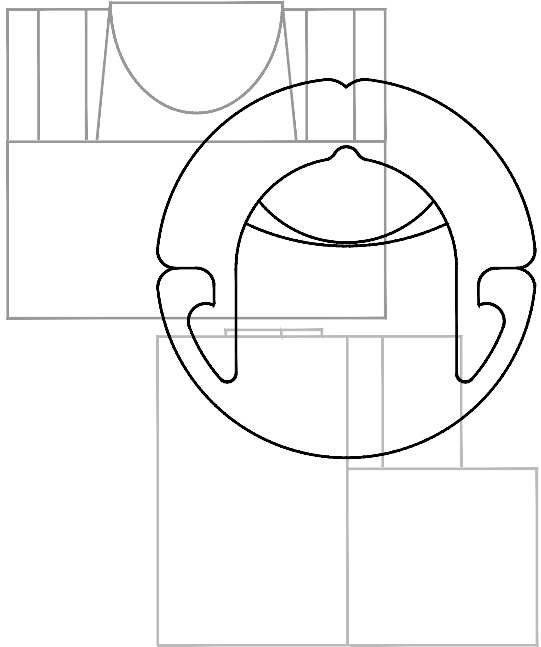
The three loose parts are knotted with a ribbon, while at the point of their mutual contact they already get stuck, due to being squeezed. And of course, formal visual tension arises in the way how the 2D planes create an isosceles tripod, both above and below.

I became surprised, by the formal analogy, that I thought, I could see with designs by Isamu Noguchi. My piece of furniture thus became a tribute to Noguchi's work. After decades of wonder, his Japanese-infused design language, still remains a tantalizing mystery to my Western eye-mind.



Isamu Noguchi, Nina and Gordon Bunshaft
at Ryōan-ji Garden, Kyoto (original photography 1960)



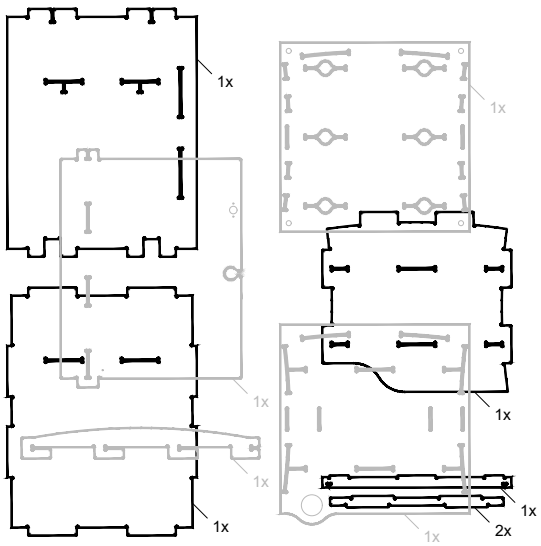


PlusMinusChair / chair / 2008 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of RealSoftShop /

The PlusMinusChair clearly shows how the separated 2D cut parts are fitted together like a puzzle, resulting in this fantastic and extremely comfortable chair.

Sometimes even little seems sufficient.





50% less Series, for Kho Liang Ie / cabinet / 2019 /
 design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
 part of CNC Workshop /

It seems an obvious and necessary eco-target to reduce our consumption in general; let's say 50% less. The design for this simple cabinet is an attempt to do so.

The 4mm Plywood is CNC milled and this material hardly needs finishing. The parts are efficiently cut from the plate (little waste) and easily assembled by hand.

A small bend in some plate parts provides, where needed, extra strength by provoking pre-stress. The 'primitive' hinge appears reminiscent of the first cabinet door hinge, that humanity came up with.

The ribbon, that replaces the glue, reminds us of the nomadic existence of our ancestors. It is obvious, that the furniture can easily be disassembled again and possibly reused in parts afterwards.

Above all, the design seems an exercise in and an ode to improvisation. After all, this is the most important activity, that makes civilizations move forward.



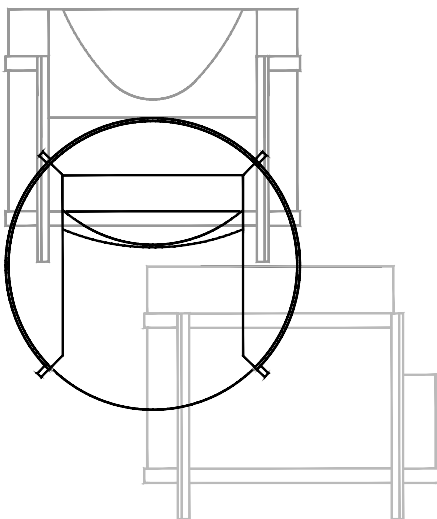
PM Chair / chair / 2008 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of RealSoftShop /

The PM-Chair is one such design that could have been conceived long ago. The piece of furniture seems, as it were, to have been distilled from furniture history with the use of artificial intelligence.

As if it is a completion of the arsenal of purifications of form that Modernism wanted to stand for; an interpretation of a Pro Memory.

The chair is equipped with a steel or wooden frame and cushions made of Poly-Urea coating, fabric, leather, etc.

Print in collaboration with artist Fransje Killaars





Heritage Series / porcelain tableware / 2015 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
in collaboration with Jo Schoenmakers - Vormstof /

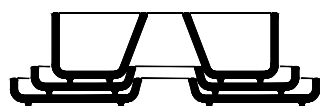
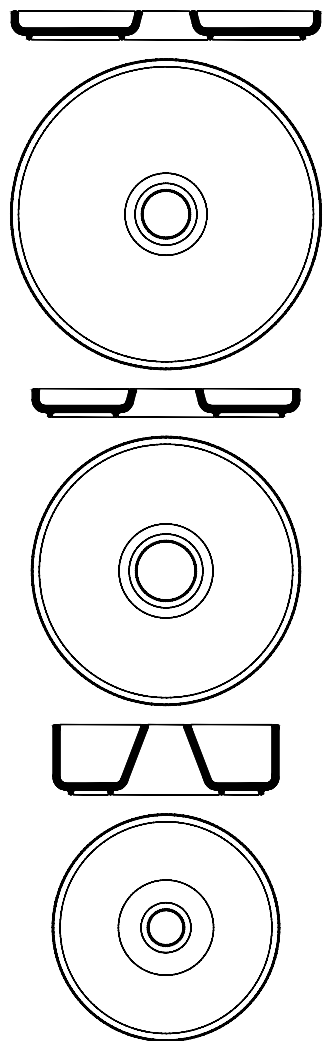
I wanted to design this tableware, hoping that by doing so, it would bring me closer to the legacy of the Maastricht porcelain industry. Whilst working on it, I became aware that this requires a great deal of professional knowledge. In my case, I found that expertise in Jo Schoenmakers / Vormstof.

I designed crockery with a recalcitrant hole in the middle.

It goes without saying, that anyone who is allowed to live in our contemporary Western civilization enjoys many unprecedented privileges. We (almost all) have the luxury of not having an exhausting task in stressfully collecting enough food every day. The tableware I designed commemorates that luxury or, if desired, that lack, symbolized by that hole in the middle of every plate and bowl.

In addition, that hole demands our attention, when scooping and stirring, since we are so used to doing this with a thoughtless routine.

We commemorate that tasting takes time.



Base Series / table / 2004 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

Every day, we thoughtlessly enjoy many fantastic inventions, such as a pocket, tape, paper or.... a side table.

I wanted to honour this series of fantastic life supporters with a design of a series of (side) tables which look as if a child (or artist Paul Klee) has drawn them: a horizontal plane and perpendicular to it in the four corners, each time a line / leg.

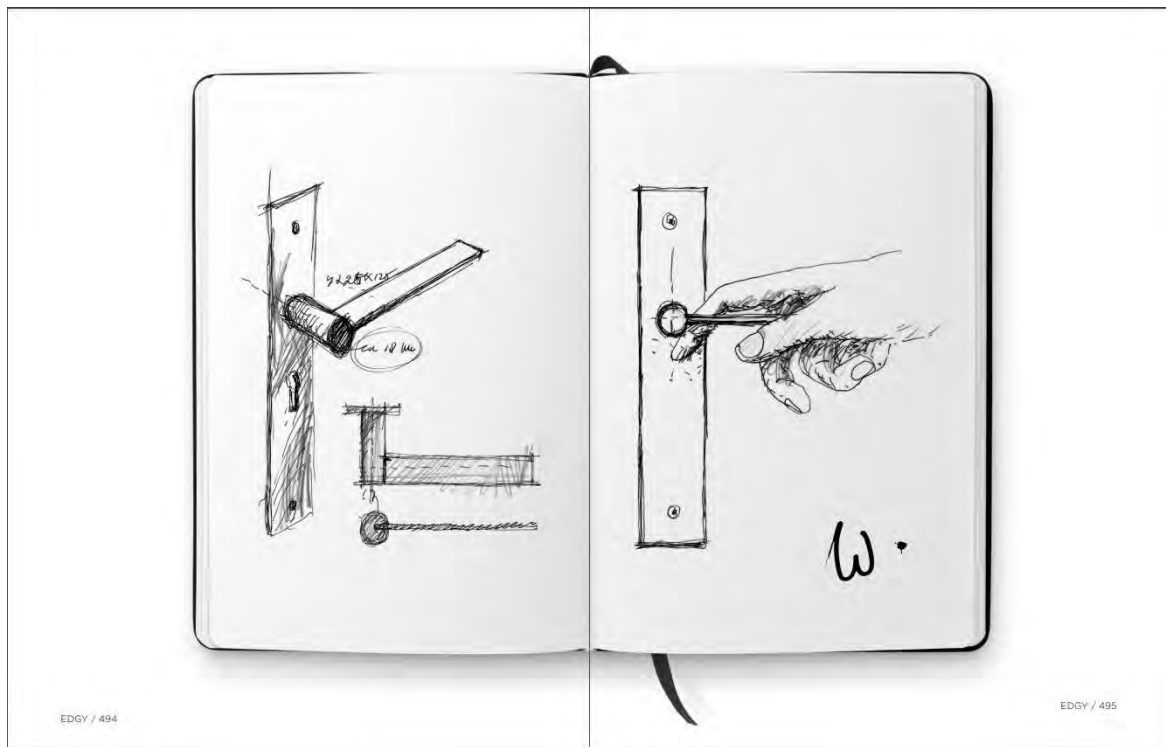
But, you know, simplicity in form demands the utmost in detailing and execution. By finding the right ratio between the smallest material sizes and the quality of the welding node (between top and leg), the tables look quite slender; still they are extremely sturdy.

I thought, I should laser cut out the date of production (as a tribute to artist On Kawara), so that the steel sheet shows its thickness and physicality more emphatically. I designed an archaic-looking font for this purpose.

I also fantasised that in a future excavation, perhaps a few civilisations further down the line when we, the people of today, will be dust again, this silly utensil has a much greater eternal value and will then inevitably raise archaeological questions.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9





edgy / door handle series / 2005 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
in collaboration with Formani Holland bv. /

This door handle looks like a direct materialisation of a concept sketch. It is obvious, that the round shaft rotates by putting pressure on the flat handle. Together with the design of this basic handle, a whole series of handles and other door fittings was developed.

The design, clearly, takes a stand against the misguided assumption that ergonomics are only served with a seamlessly fitting counter-shape. The many meaningful touches we know, often find their instructive tension because the touch surfaces and shape of the touch partners differ.

Perfecting the manufacturing process required years of mechanical studies and detailed knowledge of the technology behind door fittings which was carried out in consultation with the globally-operating Formani company.



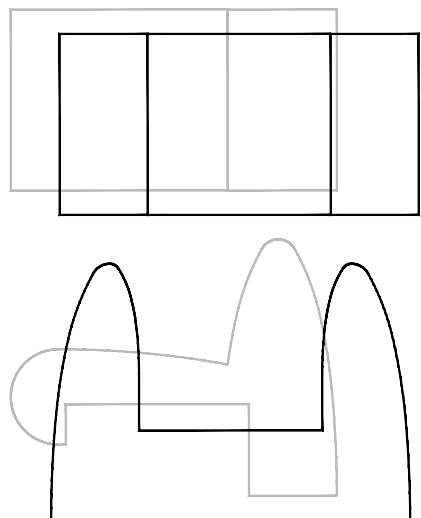
GrandChair / low chair / 2008 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of RealSoftShop /

The GrandChair seems to be a hip version of the comfortable, traditional 'grandma armchair'; thus a universal chair.

The chair looks inviting; rightly so. This object provides optimum comfort in all seating and hanging positions.

It also seems unprecedented how two simple 2D cut-outs, once pushed together, can create such an exhaustively beautiful and useful 3D volume.

Print in collaboration with artist Fransje Killaars





BalanceVase / vase / 2024 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

Sitting in a matcha teahouse, I enjoyed the slowness of the process of preparation of my matcha. Subsequently, I drank that tea with a comparable slowness. As a reward, I sketched the balance vase in my head.

I suppose that after all, adult life mainly consists of finding the right balance.

Fortunately for reassurance, you can move the vase slightly sideways in case your (bouquet) partner turns out to be of a different nature or exhibits different behaviour.



3-legged low chair / 2008 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of CNC Workshop /

Perhaps the first chair in our civilization had three legs, simply because for a very long time, the floor was not necessarily level. Nevertheless, this three legged construction principle still continues to challenge designers nowadays.

I felt, that my version should have two legs at the back, because the user at the front, uses their legs to prevent the chair from tipping over. After all, all the reverse variants appear to have a painful problem. In any case, the cooperative, hybrid use of artificial and human technology seems more contemporary than ever.

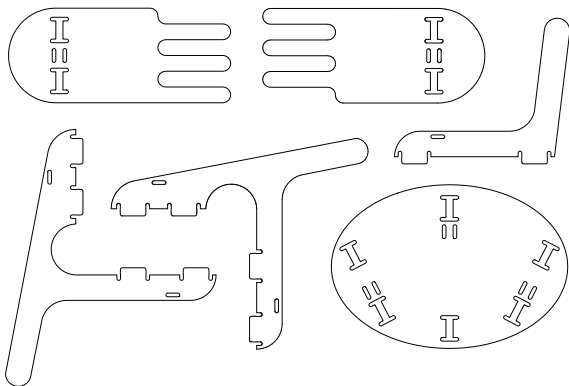
I came to understand that with the limitation of only 2D plane surfaces, you can make expressive 3D objects and that connections between parts may also have a formal, almost graphic and showy quality.

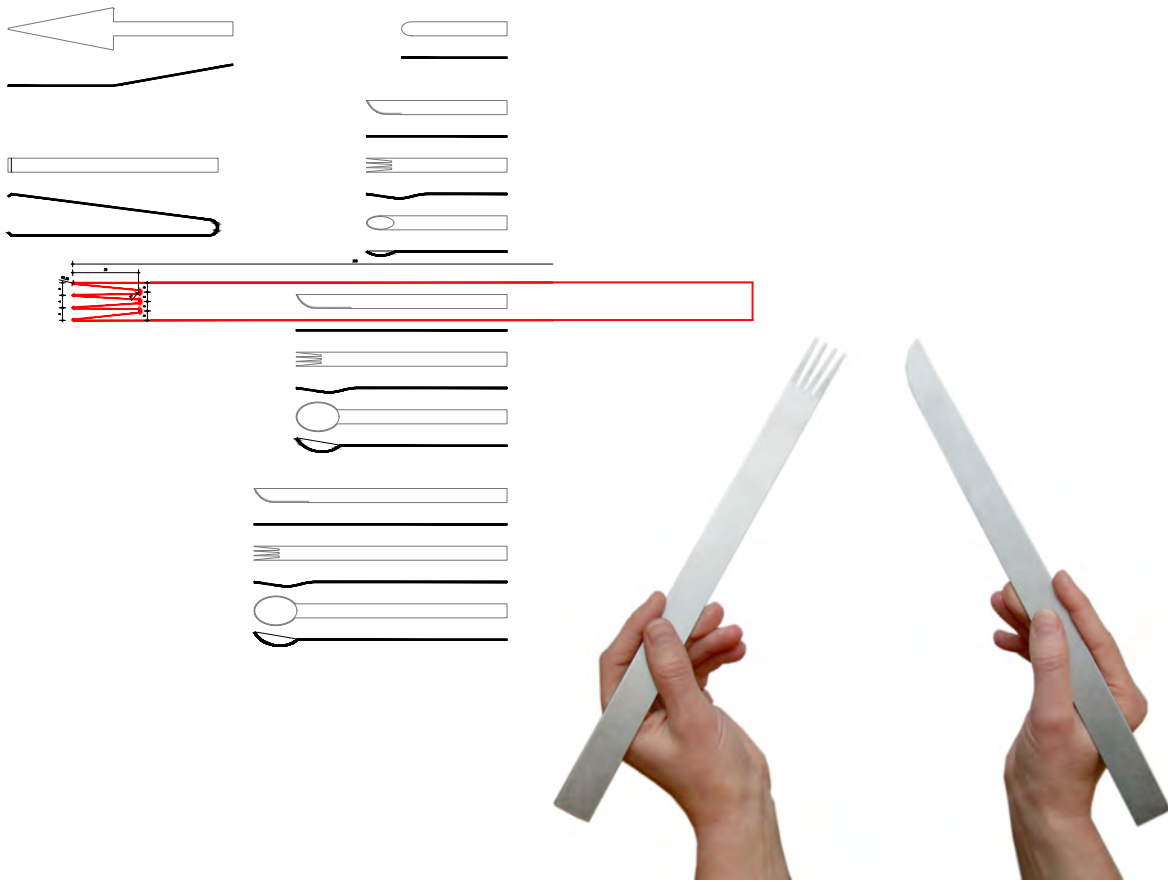
For now, I am content with my furniture design, even more after, I noticed an affinity with what the Eames team designed as their LCW (Lounge Chair Wood).

More important, I still want to teach myself, why this seat height and posture is somewhere between adrenaline and relaxed.



ThreeLeggedChair in House in a Curved Road,
Kazuo Shinohara, Japan (Tokyo), 1969





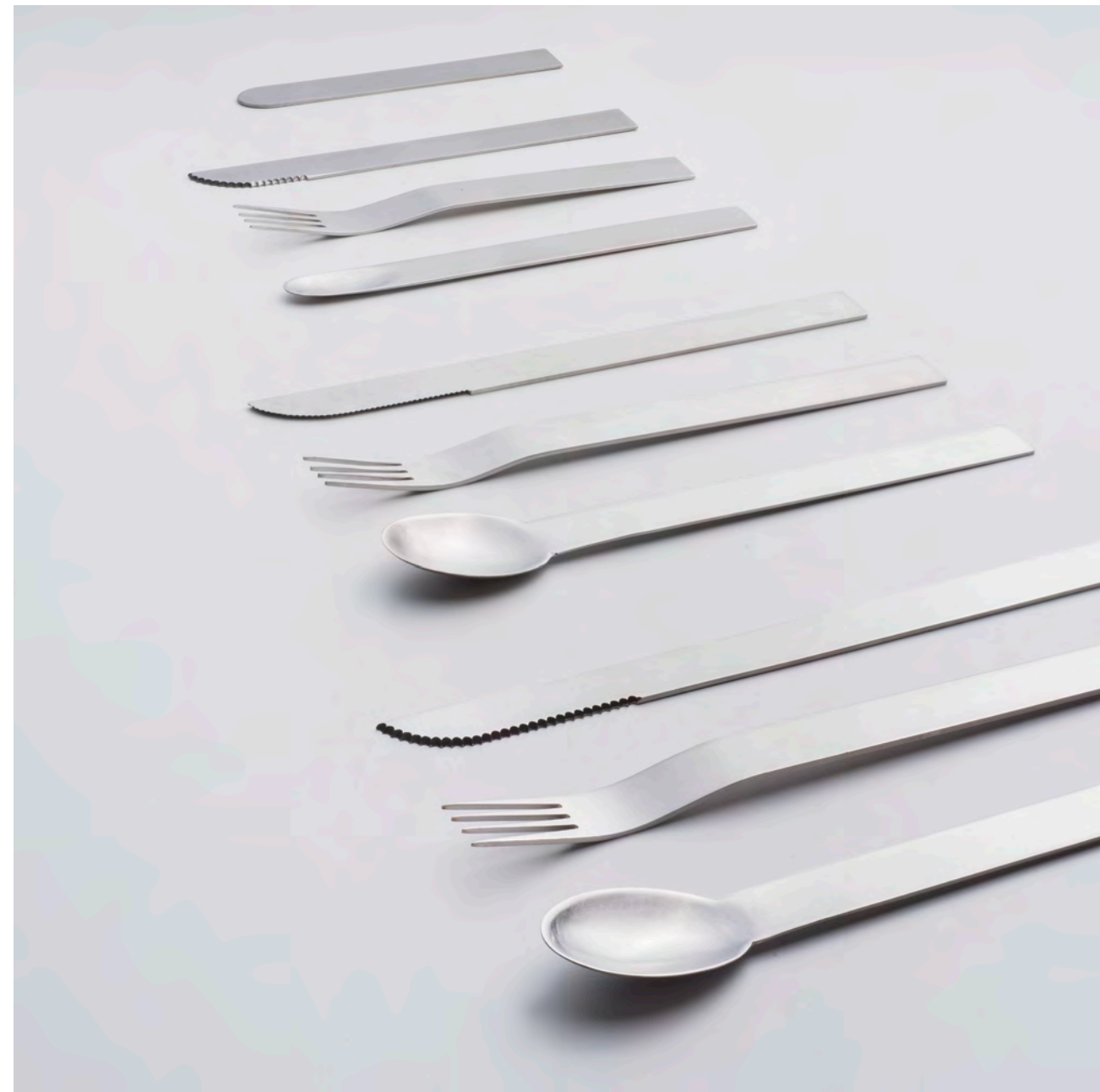
Slim & Slender / 2010 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

While dining with Slim & Slender, you might experience the joy of an apparently simple object that proves to be of great practical use. As our ancestors must have felt, when they cracked a nut with a stone.

For those who believe they can recognise efficiency, it will be clear that this cutlery is made by minimal processing of a standard stainless-steel flat strip.

Once in the hand, the cutlery feels like a surgical tool. It brings a delicate attention, and perhaps a more conscious eating.

As so often, a bit of morality does not hurt; eat slowly and enjoy, stay slender and healthy.



misty / vase / 2024 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /
part of PlexiWorkshop /

It is often a bit disappointing when you think you 'see' and therefore understand 'it'.
After all, a little mist, a veil, a mysterious look or any other suggestion immediately
makes our brains want to make a lot more out of what there might actually be.

Imagine that our vase puts a veil over its flowers, thus making them even more
promising.



Zigzag Anew / chair / 2024 /
design by Mathieu Bruls architect, for www.M12.nl /

Rietveld designed the ZigZag chair in 1934. He put his design into production from 1936. We may conclude that Rietveld considered the design complete form that moment on.

The design bears some strange “imperfections”. These are probably partly due to do the (un)available materials and manufacturing technology at the time. Naturally, for Rietveld at the time the completely new form (language) was more important than a few details, which now raise quite a few questions for me. Rietveld’s entire oeuvre seems, in a sense, to be shaped by this accepted, or even sought, imbalance. An imbalance that we read about so many years later; with the acceptable excuse of course being the completely unique experimental character of what Rietveld was able to create in his time.

The remake of the chair that we are producing as a test and current tribute to the ZigZag and Rietveld’s oeuvre is being “improved” on a number of point.

0*

We overwork the design, so it can be produced in Computer Numeric Control (CNC). After its design we additionally invest in digital programming of the CNC-machinery.

1*

We build our remake from industrially glued solid wood. Rietveld had to glue together such large plank dimensions himself.

2*

By adjusting the geometry of the bottom surface, as well as the sides of the backrest, all surfaces of both sides of the chair geometrically lie in an plane. That straight forward one-line-effect for sure was important. It is even the core of what we will later call the Freischwinger; a shape family that the chair design wanted to belong to.

However, that effect is in the original ZigZag realized by excessive rubbing-towards-each-other.

3*

The round holes in which the nuts of the bolted connection are tightened are provided with a flat support surface at the bottom, to support the nuts.

4*

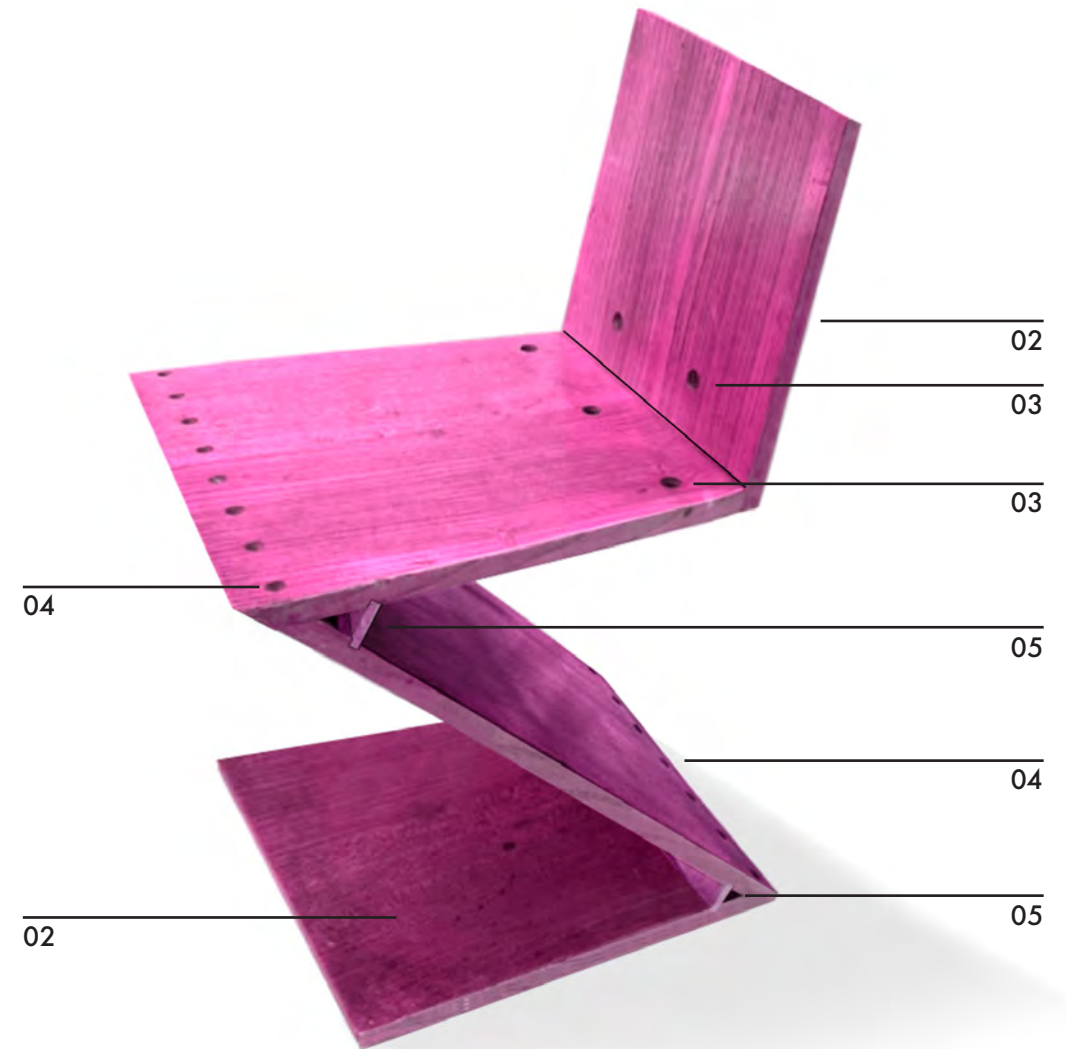
The screw holes in the triangular connections are finished in the same flat plane as the bottom of the bolt / nut that will rest on it.

5*

The triangular reinforcement blocks in the 2 inner corners are replaced by thin solid wooden slats, glued in positionally fixed sawn slots.

6*

We have enhanced our remake in a pink color, in addition to the many, often provocative, color schemes that Rietveld already painted.



Colophon

BeeldEssay #40

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