DESIGN EDIT

# Some Excellent Chairs From New York Design Week USM cord chairs, a rare Gaudí design, and more finds from this year's festival.

By Anthony Paletta

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Photo-Illustration: Curbed; Photos: Joe Kramm, Charles Billot, Soojin Lee, Nacho Alegre

SAVE | 1 COMMENT

For many designers, the urge to make a chair often seems primal, even essential. But as Mies van der Rohe once commented, "A chair is a very difficult object. A skyscraper is almost easier." You can't hide your work with cladding and curtain walls, but you still have to produce a structurally sound object (most of the time). Unlike building a skyscraper, however, you don't need millions of dollars — just some skill and a little scrap wood. The options are almost endless, and the results of that challenge are on full display this New York design week. We have chairs of rough and polished wood, steel tubes and mirrored steel, and at least one chair that looks more like a letter of the alphabet than a piece of furniture. One even features car parts. Usually it would require an accident for those to end up in your living room; this one comes from a year of creative experimentation.

## Joaquim Tenreiro's rattan chaise at Bossa Annex

Photo: Joe Kramm

Joaquim Tenreiro is the great god of Brazilian furniture, the son of a Portuguese cabinetmaker who combined old-fashioned methods with luxurious Brazilian woods and essentially pioneered Brazilian Modernism in furniture form. He never sold out to a Brazilian Knoll or Herman Miller, working constantly on smaller commissions, a number of which were recommended by Oscar Niemeyer. So many pieces are singular at Bossa Annex, which has opened one of the most comprehensive shows of his work. It's titled "Inventing a Modern Tropical Living," and this isn't even slightly hyperbolic.

There are things most modernists simply didn't do; rattan fell largely out of fashion, except in the case of Marcel Breuer's Cesca and Pierre Jeanneret's Chandigarh chairs. No one would design a chaise with cane panels for both the head and footrests except for Tenreiro — this is one he designed for a construction bigwig in Ipanema. The move lightens the piece at both ends, which is grounded by splayed rosewood legs. *On view at Bossa Annex through June 30.*

AD THERE'S BEAUTY IN THE BURN CALIA STYLE BUILT TO MOVE SHOP NOW
POWERED BY CONCERT FEEDBACK

## Antoni Gaudí's Batlló Chair at Casa Valle

Photo: Nacho Alegre/

There's *another* Barcelona chair on hand this week, one that's 20 years older than the one by Mies. Everyone knows Gaudí's architecture; his furniture is a more esoteric thing. It has hardly been available in the U.S., but is for the first time at any scale in this reissue of the dining chair from his Casa Batlló in Barcelona. Giancarlo Valle and Jane Keltner de Valle went to Barcelona on the Gaudí pilgrimage route and resolved to make his work available to us, but it's a small edition of 50.

Gaudí knew what he was doing. He worked as a carpenter while studying architecture, and one of his cabinets caught the eye of Eusebi Güell, who became an early and repeat patron, responsible for Park Güell in Barcelona.

He did not abandon furniture when he became a major architect, continuing to churn it out for commissions. The floral delicacy of earlier works receded a bit by Batlló, but it's still unmistakably a piece that no one else would produce, with a backrest that looks like a hammerhead shark and legs that seem borrowed from a spindly quadruped. The slightly unnerving quality of Gaudí's skeletal frames and ornamentation (described by Salvador Dalí as "erogenous shapes that bristle like a sea urchin") vanishes here in ebony-finished oak, handcrafted by artisans in Barcelona using the same methods as they did the first time around. It's not all caprice; the seat widens for comfort. *On view during design week at Casa Valle.*

## Colin Knight's Wedge Chair at Superhouse

Photo: Matthew Gordon

The chair in art takes on a variety of forms: Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel,* or Marisol's *Andy*. They do not typically inspire the design of actual chairs. Colin Knight, whose works frequently riff off of history and art, has commingled two of these interests in his Wedge chair, drawing upon both his grandmother's experiences of the London Blitz and Joseph Beuys's *Fettstuhl* (Fat Chair). Beuys topped his chair with a bluff of fat covered in wax; Knight has swapped fat with a leather cushion attached with straps. It repels efforts to sit, but gently — it both replicates the form of Beuys's lardy slather and nods to the devastation of the Blitz (the top points and rest also nod to stretcher construction at the time). There's some humor; the typical wedge chair involves a gentle grade to ease seating, but the topography here is more daunting. My regular advice when anyone questions artful but uncomfortable chairs is to buy them and have your guests sit in them; in this case, everyone can sit elsewhere and look at it. *On view during NADA 2025, available at Superhouse.*

## Lido Steel Chair by Paolo Ferrari

Photo: Courtesy of Paolo Ferrari

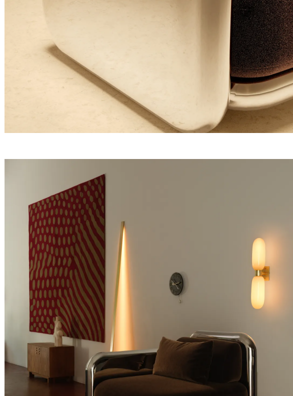

Photo: Joe Kramm

Paolo Ferrari has produced a great range of design from Toronto in recent decades, mixing materials and color with Gio Ponti–esque abandon. Ferrari has a Kagan-like habit of doubling up chair and sofa volumes; these things don't have to look like one piece. He has ventured in a new direction here with the very swank Lido Steel chair. This is not a turn toward harsh functionalism; the steel is mirrored to an extreme, translucent to evanescent depending on the light. Its apparent weightlessness is accentuated by the fact that it has one arm; a thrilling absence. *On view at Love House through May 31.*

## "Woven Structures" for USM by Henry Julier

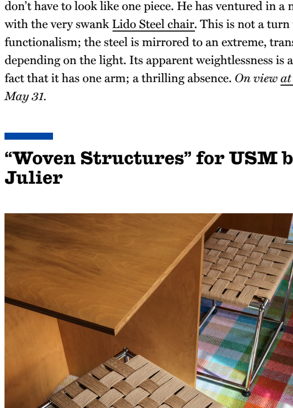

Photo: Chris Mottalini

Photo: Chris Mottalini

Henry Julier is the latest in a recent wave of designers to find potential within the confines of the USM Haller system, which has burst well beyond its open office origins. Looking to do something new, he settled upon Danish paper cord, which neither USM nor he had used previously. Unbleached cord, woven in a simple checkerboard pattern, offers a maximal contrast to the industrial chrome frame and allows the system to transform into a ten-piece collection of soft benches, chairs, stools and tables. *On view at Shelter through May 19.*

## Tumi Chair by Nifemi Ogunro

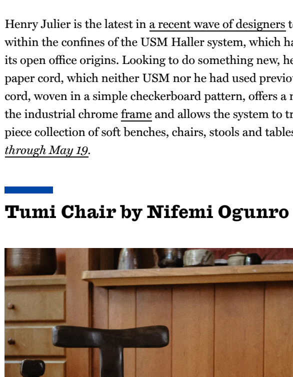

Photo: Elevine Berge/

Nigerian-American designer Nifemi Ogunro's Tumi chair, released in 2023, stands out at the Standard East Village, where it's part of "Innerwoven," a pop-up design show curated by Tione Trice of Of the Cloth. The idea for the chair came about when Ogunro was struck by the sight of a T-shaped branch in Fort Greene Park. Her photo of it morphed into a sketch, then into a 3-D model and on to its final form as a hand-carved seat. This totemic chair looks fairly simple but does not prescribe how you use it: she invited Coco Villa, a performance artist and designer, to explore and photograph herself interacting with it, and they soon found modes of use she hadn't even imagined. *On view at the Standard East Village through May 31.*

## The "A" Chair by Garnier Pingree

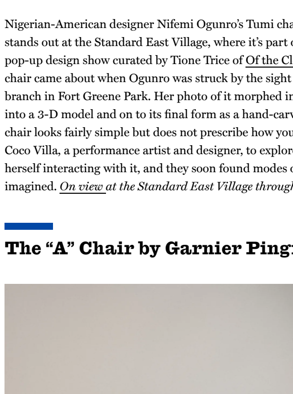

Photo: Charles Billot

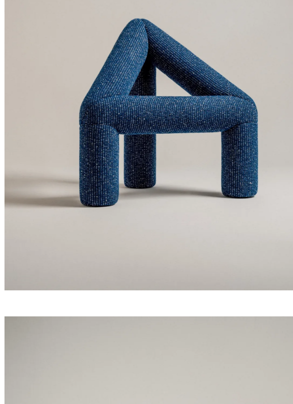

Photo: Charles Billot

In their long-running Brooklyn practice, Marie Garnier and Asa Pingree have collaged mirrors and aluminum rods together, nestled bulbs like elevator cores in steel mesh towers, and molded fiberglass into airy-looking chairs and benches. Their new "A" chair is an experiment in upholstered foam and steel tubes that invites you to sit as you wish; Pingree found inspiration in his child finding a comfortable nook within the triangle of his crossed legs. The "A" chair takes that concept to an even more elemental form with its simple frame. It is also, they stress, a collaboration with the user. Find your own pose — and then another. *On view at Shelter; available at the studio's website.*

## Luke Malaney's "Everybody Knows" Chair

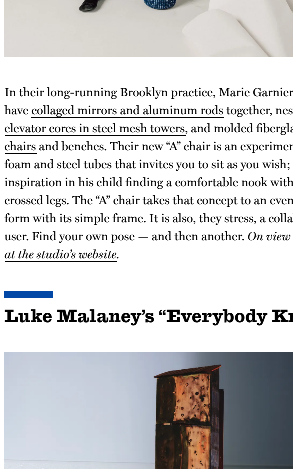

Photo: Sahra Jajarmikhayat

Luke Malaney has found inspiration in Karel Appel, Marsden Hartley, and much else, producing highly crafted, knobby works that look like rusticated offshoots of the Vienna Secession. He's not afraid of wood grain and imperfections, and in fact he often seems to carve the material to showcase them. "Everybody Knows" is a throne that willfully undermines its own authority (if only we had more of this lately) with a cracked copper headpiece lining a cabinet on the back. Adding storage to a form that's meant to project royal authority is a delightful subversion. The title is a Leonard Cohen nod, and the fissures in the frame are inspired by a lyric from "Anthem": "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." It's hewn of ash, cherry, bamboo, sapele, and pine with occasional splashes of paint, and then joined together. *On view at Forced Perspective at Radio Star through May 20.*

## Chen & Kai's Walnut Corner Chair at Colony

Photo: Courtesy of Chen & Kai

Chen Chen and Kai Williams have produced an exhilarating range of work in recent years, from the far-out, like their "Pineal Lobotomy" chair, fabricated out of found branches, steel, and rope, to the cozy — a footstool inspired by Moravian ceramic methods. This year they've released an object of clever simplicity with their Walnut Corner chair. Given the diagonal placement of the backstrap, it's explicitly designed so people sit on its corner. It's also a visible collaboration between the two designers: Williams crafted a single, curved steel tube to provide the legs and backrest while Chen contributed the two wooden legs and the actual seat. The wood is walnut, and that's not all; actual walnut shells ornament the ends of a leather strap, a nod to the Chinese tradition of passing Wenwan walnuts down over generations. *On view at the Independents show at Colony through May 21.*

## Bookmonster by Minsu Jang

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5. The New New New South Street Seaport

Photo: Jung Jin Lee and Christian Lee

Photo: Sonjia Lee

Mima Jang's Bookmonster for *ELF* is a reassuringly literary boast, a combination chair and bookshelf crafted out of 18 layers of plywood. Its resemblance to a spine down volume with the pages splayed out is entirely intentional. The monster actually consists of three parts: the chair itself and two detachable wings, although it would seem a shame to clip them. When attached, books spiral around the occupant, readily at hand. When not aside, the wings are still useful, forming side tables that can be arranged in a number of ways and continue to function as containers for books. The chair is charged both with its fortuous orange shade and the promise of every book one might read within it. On view at Wanted/*ICFF* and available at the artist's website.

## "Not for Automotive Use" by MSCHF with Mercedes-AMG

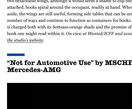

Photo: Nick Harper

MSCHF (sound it out) is a collective operating out of Brooklyn that has repurposed Birkin bags into sandals, released perfectly edible Airpods, and mounted paintball guns on robot dogs. They've just launched a new collection of furniture in collaboration with Mercedes-AMG using its car parts. They site Achille Castiglioni, who borrowed all sorts of automotive parts for domestic use back in the day, as inspiration (other '70s Italian designers such as Fabio de Sanctis and Ugo Sonzini mounted Fiat doors on clear feet to blindfully pointless ends). Some of these pieces have an area of magic field. The headlight crash is different. It's a mod shape, upholstered in the black suede used in cars and lined with two headlights — somehow just what seating has always been missing.

## Liberamente Chair by Soft Witness

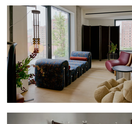

Photo: Hugh Mathers

Whitney Kerger's Liberamente chair for her firm Soft Witness is a transfixing thing: an abstracted composition of three arches topped by bolster. It looks modular but is not (not in the way you might think — two chairs can be combined at the seat ends to form a daybed); the previously released the piece with monochrome fabrics. The enchanting twist here is that the chair's upholstery, in fact, is made of vintage Japanese kimono architectural fitness. It's another of many clever pieces from Soft Witness that stir history into fresh new forms. *On view at the Hive shop at 2 Chapel through May 24.*

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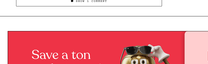



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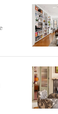
**The New New New South Street Seaport** The latest owners are betting on immersive spaces and rooftop bars. Will it finally become a real neighborhood?



**CHEAP & MILLION** | PUBLISHED AT 3:45 P.M.
**A Chelsea One-Bed With a Very Appealing Shelving System for $725,000** And a two-bed, two-bath that might be worth the move to Bushwick.

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**A Taste of Oaxaca on Bank Street** Juan Carretero's restored apartment channels his family's ancestral home in Mexico.

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**'I Turn to My Right and the Boat Is *Right* There'** What a driver on the Brooklyn Bridge saw as a ship struck it.

**LAWSUITS** | MAY 19, 2022
**The Party Boy Who Moved Into Senior Housing on East 72nd Street** "He was very tall, very noisy, and full of beer and pot."

**TRIGGERS** | MAY 19, 2022
**A Park Avenue Apartment Grand Enough for William Randolph Hearst** The duplex on the 19th and 20th floors of the Ritz Tower is almost too pedigreed.

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**2 Dead After Mexican Navy Sailing Ship Hits Brooklyn Bridge** The massive sailing ship somehow lost power and was dragged under the bridge, snapping its masts. Nearly two dozen crew members were injured.

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**This Week's Worth-It New York City Apartment Listings** A big fat duplex, just for you to dread over.

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**That Decrepit Mansion Next to the Gowanus Whole Foods Is for Sale** The landmarked building, vacant for more than two decades, might actually find a buyer this time.

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**We Asked Curators and Designers What to See This Design Week** Chen & Kai, Sight Unseen's Monica Khemsurov, and others weigh in.

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**Federal Judge Removes Rikers Island From City Control** U.S. District Judge Laura Taylor Swain ordered that an independent manager be appointed to oversee the notorious jail complex.

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**Who Turned the Angelika Into a Furniture Showroom?** We went to see a movie and discovered something was off.

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