

ICONS



DESIGN WITHIN REACH

Chair Apparent

BY TIFFANY FIGUEIREDO

The Eames lounge chair is still cool and still comfortable.

The iconic Eames lounge chair and ottoman set, a staple of contemporary homes and offices all over America, turns 50 this year. Thanks to its still-striking aesthetic (it's just plain cool) and undeniable comfort, it is as relevant today as it was a half-century ago.

The molded plywood and leather chair and ottoman were designed by the husband-and-wife team of Charles and Ray Eames as a birthday gift for a friend, legendary Academy Award-winning director Billy Wilder. At the time, the couple were at the forefront of the design movement to modernize postwar America and were known for their desire to give the American public mass-produced, useful designs that did not compromise on quality or beauty.

Charles Eames said that he wanted the lounge chair to have the "warm, receptive look of a well-used first baseman's mitt." Because it was molded to perfectly cradle the human body, upholstery was unnecessary. It was a fitting example of modern American design, sacrificing neither form nor function and appealing to a wide cross section of people. The couple introduced the chair and ottoman to the public on NBC's

The Home Show (which is now known as the *Today* show), and it has been in continual production by furniture manufacturer Herman Miller ever since.

The chair also is the focus of a traveling exhibit organized by the Grand Rapids Art Museum in Michigan. The exhibit features an "exploded" sculpture of the chair, which shows each of its components pulled apart and suspended, an early production of the chair and ottoman used by Herman Miller founder D.J. De Pree in his Michigan home, a short film documenting the current production of the chair by the Eameses' grandson Eames Demetrios, as well as archival clips of the chair's high-profile 1956 introduction on television. The exhibit is on view at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York through Sept. 3, then it heads back Oct. 6 to Michigan through the end of the year. Call 616-831-1000 for more information.

Purchasing this iconic chair and ottoman is an investment — and a smart one. There is little doubt that the set will hold its value, for hovering near the top of the country's most-coveted list of furnishings for 50 years is quite an accomplishment. And because the design actually works, leaving no room for improvement, it is destined to remain an impressive possession for at least another 50 years.



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