

KNOLL INTERNATIONAL FURNITURE DESIGN

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Client: Knoll International

Completion: 1984

The new furniture commissioned by Knoll includes a series of nine laminated plywood chairs, a sofa, coffee table, and two high tables. This furniture breaks the boundary between Traditional and Modern design by adapting a series of historical styles to industrial processes and by using symbolism and decoration in a Modern Way.

The chairs are “both-end,” combining modern technology with historic symbolism, comfort with elegance, function with fun. They are made of molded, laminated plywood. From the front view, they present a complex silhouette and a surface that is ornamentally perforated. They look quite different from the front and the side, with the front acting as sign, and the side view appearing refined and subtle. The patterns may vary enormously without altering the basic method of production, therefore, they can be anything from Chippendale to Art Deco represented in one dimension.

The surfaces of some of the chairs use wood grain, others have plastic laminate finishes in plain colors. Yet others are decorated with patterns within the laminate. The “Grandmother” pattern is a soft representational pattern overlaid with a random geometric pattern. There is also a Paola Navona pattern reminiscent of French Faux patterns. Other chairs have applied stencil patterns derived from Hepplewhite and Art Deco designs as well as from the painted borders of traditional country furniture.

In all the furniture, the referents are symbolic and representational, not historically accurate. The aim is exemplification and representation, not reproduction. The historic representation is a picture of a style, it is not intended to fool the eye. The profile is abstracted and generalized to stress silhouette.

Although it was designed by one firm all at one time, this line of furniture has no motival unity -- but it does have an eclectic unity. Its historical eclecticism, achieved through the representation of many styles, is paralleled by eclecticism of form and method. This furniture can be seen as part of the tradition of Modern furniture, as an evolution within the bounds of Modern design.



Generic chair form



Square table



Couch

