Good Design: Stories from Herman Miller

November 21, 2009 — January 17, 2010; opening November 20, 6-8 pm

The Goldstein Museum of Design (GMD) will be the first venue on the national tour of Good Design: Stories from Herman Miller, exploring the collaborative problem-solving design process employed at the world-renowned furniture company, Herman Miller, Inc. Organized and toured by the Muskegon Museum of Art (MMA), the exhibition drew from the vast Herman Miller Design Collection, a comprehensive archive of the company’s innovative processes and products held by The Henry Ford Dearborn, Michigan THF’s. This extraordinary partnership revealed the fascinating story of Herman Miller’s success through historical documents, most of which have never before been on public view.

MMA Executive Director Judith A. Hayner’s long-standing interest in modern design sparked a dream of showcasing original designed artifacts along with their drawings and prototypes. This exhibition is the fruition of her goal. “With Herman Miller operating in our back yard, it is important for the Museum to hold up and examine the process of design as its been practiced in West Michigan for nearly eight decades. We decided to focus on case studies that explore design problems and solutions created by some of the talented artists who have created masterpieces of modern design for the company, and continue to do so today.”

The inspiration for the exhibition came from the recent book Herman Miller: the Purpose of Design by design scholar and authority John R. Berry, first published by Rizzoli International in 2004. A second edition with updated content will be released to coincide with the exhibition’s opening at the MMA. Berry also agreed to be the exhibition’s guest curator. An extraordinary partnership with The Henry Ford made available the vast resources of that institution’s Herman Miller Design Collection, most of which has never before been on public view. Finally, Herman Miller agreed to underwrite the exhibition’s organization while affording the MMA the academic and esthetic freedom to critically explore its legacy.

Commenting on the idea behind the exhibition, Berry observed, “Many people are confused by the difference between art and design. Design is a noun, a verb, and a problem solving process. It is art with a purpose. Good design requires a clear understanding of the particular need, conditions, constraints, and opportunities. Good design does not happen in a vacuum.”
“At Herman Miller, design is the means and the end,” said Berry. “It is the starting point and the destination. Since 1931, not long after its founding, Herman Miller had embraced design as a way to improve people’s lives, and through that goal, they created new industries and some of the most iconic objects of the last century. Charles and Ray Eames’ molded plywood Lounge Chair, George Nelson’s Marshmallow Sofa, and Bill Stumpf and Don Chadwick’s Aeron Chair which populates so many offices today, are all products of Herman Miller, Inc.”

Exhibition themes

The exhibition will present viewers four case studies that embody active characteristics of good design revealing the problem solving ethos of Herman Miller, Inc:

- Case Study #1: Ergonomics (Seating) Good Design Explores
- Case Study #2: White Collar Work (Action Office) Good Design Inquires
- Case Study #3: Graphic Communications Good Design Engages
- Case Study #4: Mid-Century Classics Good Design Endures

Berry explained the exhibition’s organization: “Each object grouping started with identifying a need—to furnish a new type of living space, for healthier seating, to effectively communicate a message, or to support new kinds of work.” The exhibition uses drawings, models, prototypes, photographs, oral histories, and original designed objects to showcase the creation and evolution of many masterpieces of 20th and 21st century design by such artists as Gilbert Rohde, Ray & Charles Eames, George Nelson, Alexander Girard, Robert Probst, Steve Frykholm, Bill Stumpf and Don Chadwick, and others.

_Good Design: Stories from Herman Miller_ was organized for national tour by the Muskegon Museum of Art, Michigan, founded in 1912 as a division of the Muskegon Public Schools. The exhibition was created in collaboration with The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, through the generous support of Herman Miller, Inc. The exhibition was curated by John Berry, Holland; coordinated by Timothy Chester, Grand Rapids; designed by Judy Hillman and Barb Loveland, Hillman Associates, Saugatuck; and fabricated by Vincent Faust, Kalamazoo.

Local presentation of _Good Design: Stories from Herman Miller_ provided by: Lead Sponsors: Room & Board; Herman Miller, Inc. Major Sponsor: Studio Weber + Associates; Sponsors: Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, Ltd.; Design Within Reach; Julie Snow Architects, Inc. Additional funding provided by the Minnesota State Arts Board, Friends of GMD, and the College of Design.

Related Program

December 3rd, 6:30- 8:30pm  Panel discussion; _Good Design Stories_; 32 McNeal Hall
Join College of Design Dean Tom Fisher and three top design theorists/practitioners as they discuss questions related to design process and the ability of design to address the social problems of today’s consumers. Panelists:
John Berry, author and exhibition curator
Jeff Scherer, principal of Myer, Scherer, and Rockcastle Ltd., designer of the Herman Miller Design Yard and Front Door

Organized by the Friends of GMD

General Information
GMD, part of the University of Minnesota’s College of Design, supports teaching and research in design through exhibitions, publications, programs, and community partnerships. GMD celebrates diverse cultures through its collections and programs by promoting the appreciation and interpretation of design within social, cultural, aesthetic, and historic contexts.

Visitor Info
GMD Gallery is on the second floor of McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108.

Gallery Hours
The GMD Gallery is open Tuesday, Wednesday, & Friday 10 am–4 pm, Thursday 10 am–8 pm and weekends 1:30–4:30 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and all University holidays.

Admission and Parking
Admission is free. Parking is in Gortner Ramp at 1395 Gortner Avenue. The ramp and McNeal Hall are both handicapped accessible.

Public Transit
Route 87 or Campus Connector. For bus information call 612-373-3333.

This exhibition and programming is funded by the Minnesota State Arts Board in cooperation with the Minnesota State Legislature, the Friends of the Goldstein, and the College of Design.