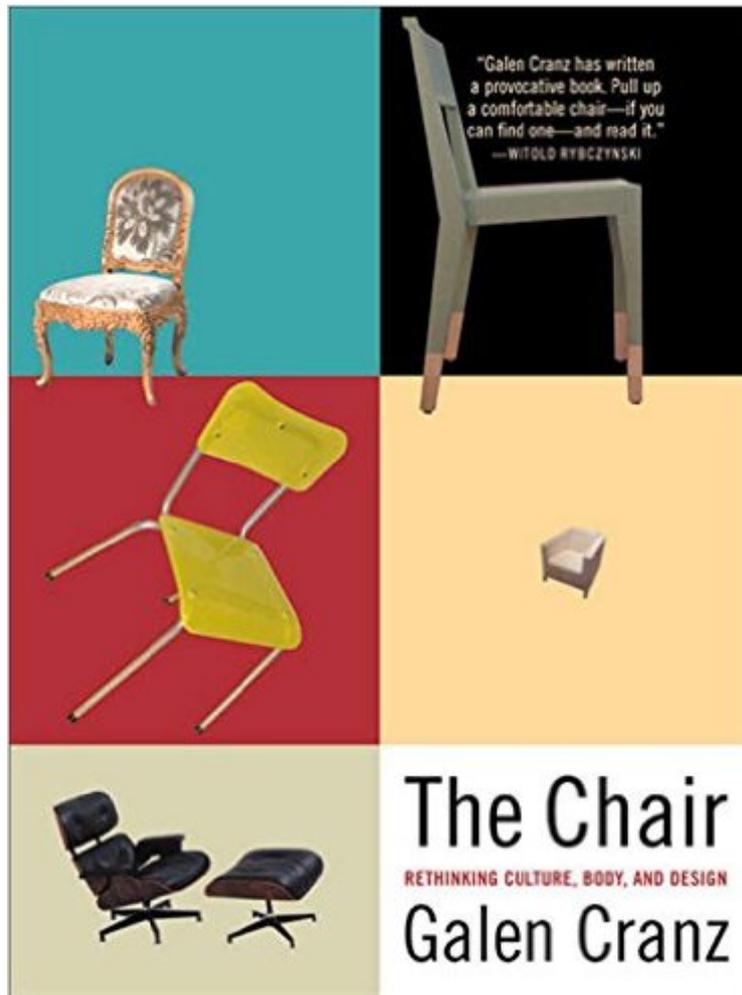


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The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, And Design



Synopsis

"Engaged in fascinating and useful multidisciplinary research, Cranz is an avatar for body-friendly design. . . . Read [The Chair] and cheer."--Elizabeth Zimmer, Village Voice Perhaps no other object of our daily environment has had the enduring cultural significance of the ever-present chair, unconsciously yet forcefully shaping the physical and social dimensions of our lives. With over ninety illustrations, this book traces the history of the chair as we know it from its crudest beginnings up through the modern office variety. Drawing on anecdotes, literary references, and famous designs, Galen Cranz documents our ongoing love affair with the chair and how its evolution has been governed not by a quest for comfort or practicality, but by the designation of status. Relating much of the modern era's rampant back pain to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle spent in traditional seating, Cranz goes beyond traditional ergonomic theory to formulate new design principles that challenge the way we think and live. A farsighted and innovative approach to our most intimate habitat, this book offers guidelines that will assist readers in choosing a chair-and designing a lifestyle-that truly suits our bodies. Praise for The Chair:Â "[A] concise, multidisciplinary gem."â •Publishers Weekly "Cranz is no sedentary historian. The Chair is a call to action."â •Jonathan Levi, Los Angeles Times "Galen Cranz has written a provocative book. Pull up a comfortable chair-if you can find one-and read it."â •Witold Rybczynski 90 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Galen Cranz on "The Chair"Reviewed by Rani Lueder, CPEThis book is about seating and sitting. Having once spent my vacation scouring Europe's museums for the earliest representation of a

chair (earliest I could find was 1570), I looked forward to opening its covers. Dr. Cranz teaches Environmental Design at the UC Berkeley Architecture Dept. Not surprisingly, she cuts a wide swath on seating, spanning history, sociology, industrial design, architecture, ergonomics, and holistic body/mind approaches - particularly the Alexander technique. Parts of her book are engrossing. In particular, her historical perspective of how chair design has evolved historically [if it is accurate] may be unmatched. Her discussion of the holistic aspects of posture is also interesting. That said, this book is NOT noteworthy for its review of the ergonomics research on sitting postures and seating. Much of it is plain hogwash. Throughout the book she refers to us as "ergonomicists" [should be "ergonomists"] and claims the discipline is derived from the Greek "ergon" and "omics" [should be "nomos" (laws)]. It is sometimes painful to read her sweeping generalizations. Dr. Cranz writes that ergonomic researchers "have concluded that the workstation should be an indication of the worker's status" (p. 55) . . . and "status differences have to be maintained, ergonomicists say" (p. 56), citing as evidence two office planning guides written by and for architects that fail to mention ergonomics or ergonomists anywhere in the books. She misrepresents research, as when she castigates Dr. Etienne Grandjean's "poor reasoning" in *Fitting the Task to the Man*, writing "Amazingly, Grandjean starts with the slump as a goal" (p. 108). Drs.

This book is more about the institution of sitting than a piece of furniture. I found especially interesting the author's explanation that a practice we take for granted as natural is really culturally derived. For the most part, only people from Western cultures sat in chairs, until those cultures came in contact with the West and adopted (or were forced to adopt) western practices. Chinese people traditionally sat on stools or benches, Africans sat on stools or squatted, Native Americans sat on the floor, the Japanese and South Asians sat on the floor. Other cultures make use of a variety of resting postures productively, but Western culture has insisted that sitting in a chair is the only posture in which to properly study, work, eat, and interact with people. The author writes that children do not naturally sit in chairs. Young children much prefer sitting on the floor, crawl, kneel, stand, or any posture other than sitting in chairs. They have to be forced to sit in chairs before they become accustomed to it. And sitting in chairs is bad for their development and health. Upon further reflection, I am coming to regard sitting in chairs in the workplace as a practice of oppression. Instead of acknowledging that human beings need a variety of postures in order to remain healthy and productive, we have forced this notion that only a certain number of postures are "professional." Women, especially, are limited in the kinds of postures that are considered acceptable. Forcing employees into one constricted posture all day is to regard them as machines instead of human

beings. While those in the executive office are allowed more comfortable chairs with a greater range of motion, room in their office to stretch, or even a couch to lounge in.

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