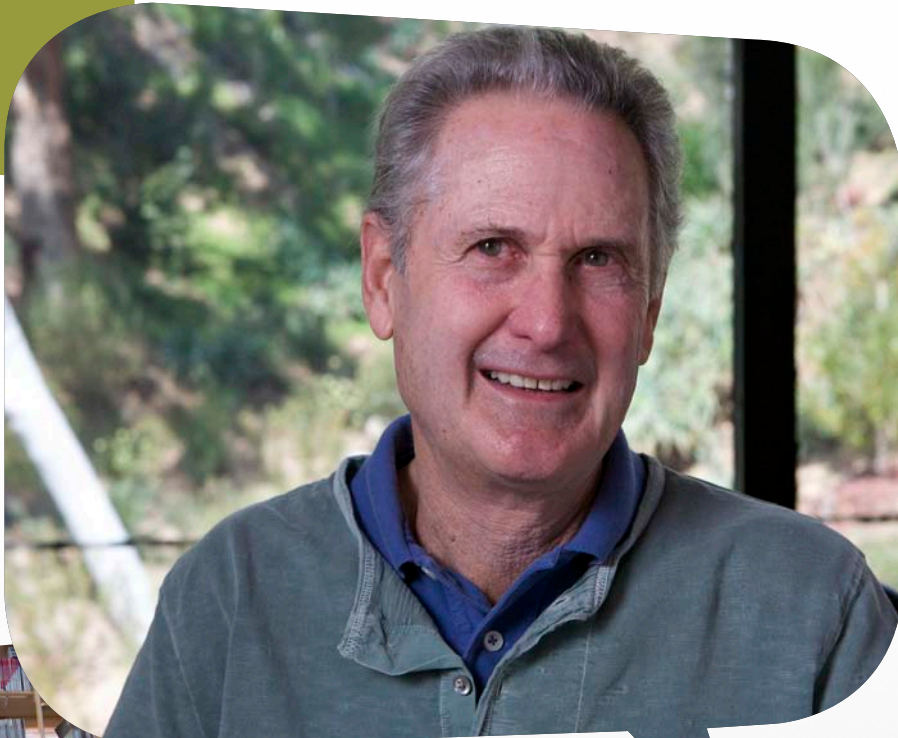


Don Chadwick

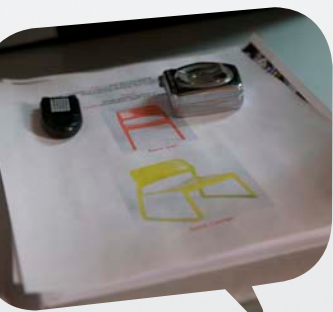
Highlight Video Transcript



How do you break new ground in something as timeless and fundamental as how we sit?

You rethink what a chair needs to be made of and how its pieces need to be built — and you work from a mindset that it must adjust to the individual completely.

Don Chadwick approaches furniture design as a serious and highly personal, involved endeavor. He also speaks of the need for a deep love of one's work. From the time he learned the tools of the trade from his cabinet maker grandfather to his early professional days in Los Angeles inspired by designers Charles and Ray Eames, Chadwick has understood that furniture design offered not only rich new creative horizons but also a chance to make a real difference in people's lives.



Charles Eames, the influential American furniture designer, saw a chair not merely as a functional item to sit on. He saw it as small-scale architecture.

Don Chadwick, co-designer with Bill Stumpf of the Aeron and Equa chairs, proved Eames 100 percent right.

A true inventor — curious, tenacious and a bit of a renegade — Don Chadwick gave people something that was daring and utterly new.

And people couldn't get enough of it.



Two of Charles and Ray Eames's famous chairs. Left: 1956 lounge chair. Right: Plywood lounge chair.

Don Chadwick, Designer

Passionate collaborator, co-creator of the Aeron and Equa chairs.

Influences.

00:03:51; 28

My mother's father came over from England as a cabinet maker. He eventually got into other businesses. But as a cabinet maker he helped me understand how to work with hand tools and wood.

00:04:43; 13

I ended up building some furniture prototypes as part of special courses in college. And then when I graduated, I worked in an architectural office. And in the graphics department. And that exposed me more not just to architecture but interior design and — and more furniture. And I just became more involved and more interested in furniture design.

But it all goes back to the hand tools, working with wood, with . . . with my grandfather on my mother's side.

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I tended to take more of an architectural point of view, I think, than a product point of view about designing furniture. So my influences were more architectural educated people.

Evolution from the inside out.

00:08:32; 29

I didn't want to just be a stylist, that was not interesting to me. I guess through my early stages of building model airplanes and trains, I got very involved with the mechanics of how things work.

00:09:13; 12

And I needed to attack something that had more of a mechanical perspective. And then the resultant final form was kind of the evolution from the inside out.

Collaboration, jazz and toys.



Don Chadwick.

“Through my early stages of building model airplanes and trains, I got very involved with the mechanics of how things work.”
— Don Chadwick



Prototype Aeron chair forms.

00:16:04; 16

Well, you know, Bill Stumpf and I, when we got together, we found a lot of common interests. I think improvisation was one of them. And jazz music was particularly of great interest to Bill. And I grew up with it as well. And we both loved toys. The idea of the toylike quality and we both had collections of toys. And so, I think those were kind of influences in the development of the chair. We wanted it to be toylike. All the parts were very specifically dictated by form and function. And, but it went together in such a way, it was almost like putting together a toy.

00:19:06; 13

You try to be a good listener, first of all. Because each one has their own expertise. And I think part of being a good designer is listening to the expertise of others, as well. But you have to, you have to be in control. And there were times with the development — not so much of the Equa chair but the Aeron chair, where we were really challenged in terms of materials and processes.

00:25:31; 13

It's not easy to collaborate. I mean, it really isn't. But out of that turmoil I think you can develop some very, very important ideas.

No upholstery. But a comfortable chair for everyone.

00:21:45; 08

You look at history and you look back. And you see elements, say, in Thonet's work. And if you look at . . . the woven cane, for instance, in all those chairs. That kind of triggers an idea: Well, maybe we don't use cane, but maybe we take that idea of something that's porous and breathable and stretched.

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And we were able to develop this whole technique for designing a chair that had the suspended elastic fabric in it. And we deliberately decided to move away from the traditions of making furniture with foam and upholstery.

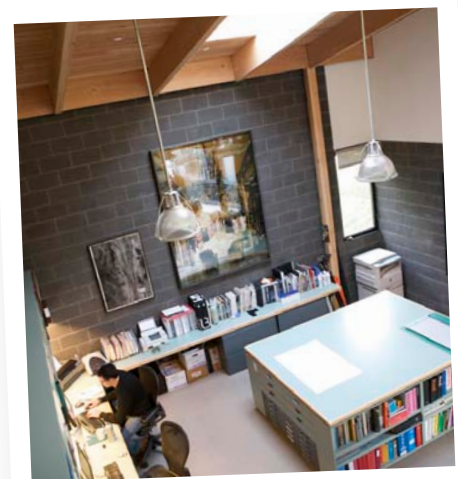
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I said, "There's no way we're gonna produce another chair with upholstery on it. We're gonna solve this problem."



Don Chadwick with an Aeron chair model.

"There's no way we're gonna produce another chair with upholstery on it."
— Don Chadwick



An overview of Don Chadwick's studio.

00:22:26; 19

And I think a lot of it was beginning to understand the whole ecology of the movement. You know, using less material to get more comfort, more utility out of less material and we've continued to move in that direction.

03:07:11; 15

Everybody deserves a good chair. Everybody deserves to be sitting in a comfortable chair. So there was no distinction between the one that was doing secretarial work or the executive. So we tried to democratize the whole idea about office seating. And that became our kind of mantra as we developed into the Aeron chair program.

Celebrating form and connection.

03:02:58; 05

We looked at musical instruments like a clarinet . . . various saxophones . . . and how all the keys operate and how you can see them. Even the Eames aluminum group products where all the parts were very refined and you displayed them, you celebrated them rather than hiding them. So this whole tilt mechanism was designed around that idea of "I'm a mechanism but I'm celebrating myself."

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I think this was one of the first times people — or manufacturers — we got this idea from motorcycles and bicycles to take all the controls and bring them outboard.

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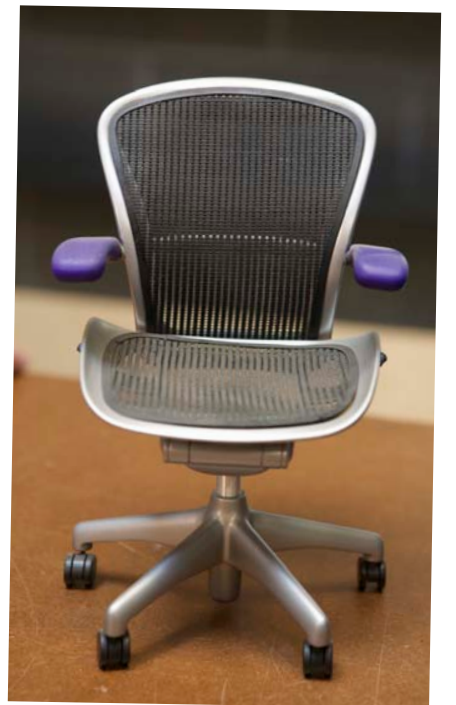
And they're actuated through actual cables. And rather than hide the cables, we just allowed the cables to line up and just like you would on a bicycle frame.

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So wherever there's a part that's connecting — you know, there's a fastener that's very carefully selected. And again, we're celebrating the form and connection, again, growing, you know, from the way Charles and Ray Eames designed a lot of their furniture.



Part of Don Chadwick's slide archive.



Aeron chair model.

Never give up.

00:21:45; 08

You look at history Well, first of all, you have to be very curious, you have to have the tenacity to stay with something you believe in.



Don Chadwick's studio.

Don Chadwick has a lot more to say.
Visit OnInnovation.com

to see his full, unedited interview, read the complete transcript
and connect with other visionaries thinking out loud.



Don Chadwick and the Equa chair.