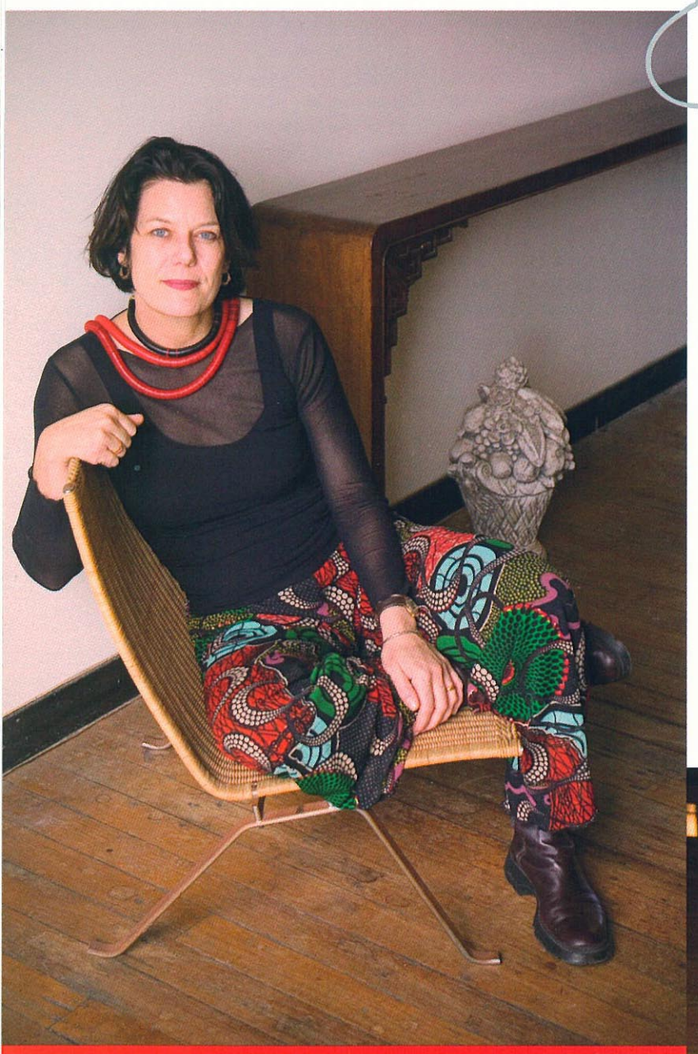
Architects & their chairs

PHOTOS: NEIL FENELON

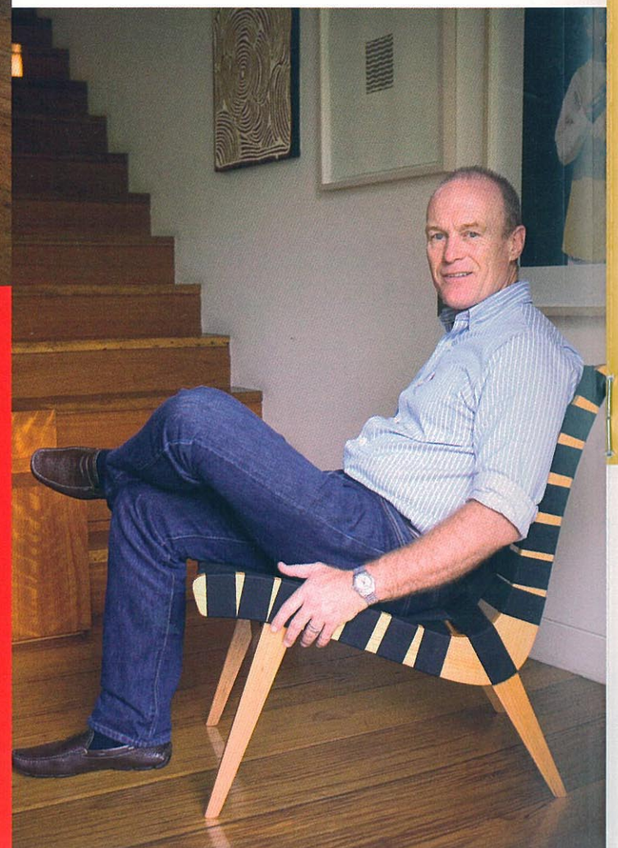


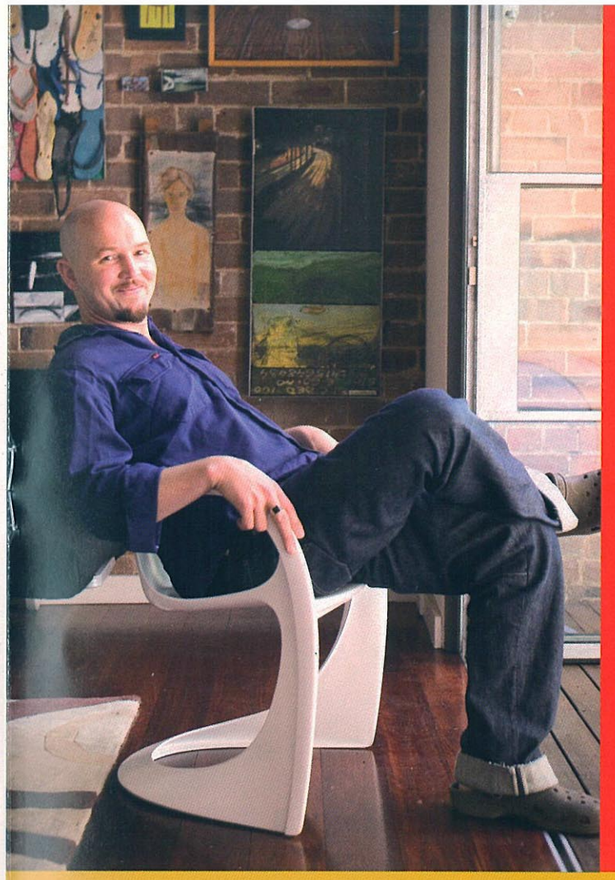
Louise Nettleton: Poul Kjaerholm PK22 1955

A friend spotted them in a shop in Newtown. It was almost 20 years ago and on the wages I was then earning, there wasn't much change after rent and food. These two chairs represented about a fortnight's wages – a big sacrifice! (I will make sacrifices for something as good as these.) They were shiny and unsoiled then, having spent their life in the Price Waterhouse lobby. We couldn't get over the fact that a designer would actually discard four PK22 chairs! In the architecture community, word got around quickly. For weeks after we had people say to us 'so you got those chairs … how much do you want for them?' I am not a conservator. I don't wrap precious items in cotton wool and put them away – whether it is a chair, a piece of pottery, or an item of clothing, it is there to use. At that time I was living in an apartment at Lavender Bay. The salt air sits heavy there and it didn't take long for the spring steel structure to break out in a rust rash. I have had moments when I thought of updating the spring steel components to the new stainless version but now I am happy with the integrity of age. They show what I have put them through. They are the same beautiful chairs I bought almost 20 years ago and mean more to me than any other iconic piece of furniture I have acquired. Just out of interest, the piece of furniture behind is a 17th century Chinese altar table – Kjaerholm has no problem accommodating a little history!

Stephen Buzacott: Snelling chair (and footstool)

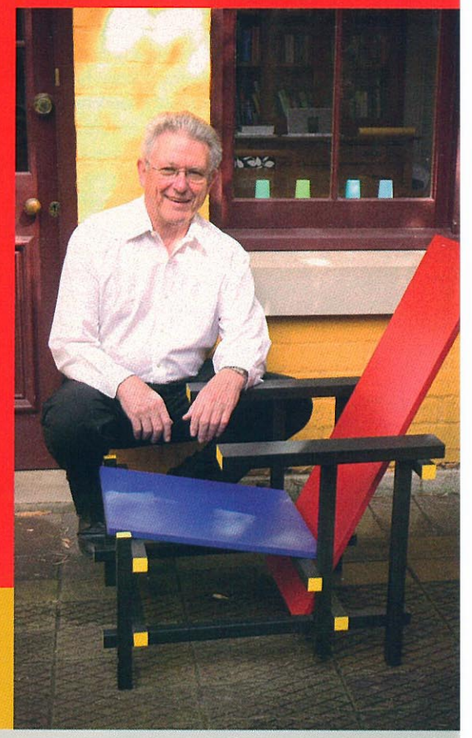
This chair was a gift, a delightful Christmas present, one that did not get hidden in embarrassment nor returned on the sly, swapped for something more appropriate. All my chairs are classics of some sort. Some were inherited – 1950s' 'TV' chairs that were in our 'den' at home and a large curvy split bamboo armchair that looks like a refugee from a beach house. The TV chairs are upright and comfortable with silky oak arms, often re-covered and still admired; the bamboo number lurks in the bedroom covered in clothes. Others were purchased – Jacobsen's Series 7 dining chairs and Eames' plywood and chrome lounge chairs. The Chrysalis fold-out sofa still does good service though, unfortunately, not many have delighted in its timber sprung fold-out bed (unlike the sprung metallic torture racks my relatives offer). I don't know much about Snelling, though coincidentally we are doing some work on the entry area to a Snelling designed apartment building in Double Bay. His influences are very much of his time, very post-war, Aalto, Wright and so on, floating planes and low timber ceilings, stone bridges over ornamental pools (long gone), functional design with vaguely Japanese influence. So, it was a pleasure to receive the restored Snelling with footstool for the aging legs. It looks fine in blond timber and black webbing … similar to the classic Aalto chairs that I have long desired but could never afford. And, it is comfortable, light to move, and the footstool handy for extra seating.





John McInerney: Red and Blue chair

Gerrit Rietveld was a member of the revolutionary De Stijl design group, founded in 1917 by Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. Rietveld, who started as a cabinetmaker, designed his iconic Red and Blue chair in 1918. For me it ranks with Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona pavilion as one of the key design creations of the 20th century. To be able to own such a significant work is a sort of guilty pleasure – made possible through a licence to build replicas. I'm sure Rietveld would have approved of multiple reproduction as the philosophy of the group was broadly democratic and dedicated towards the universal spread of good design. While modernism was well underway in the visual arts at the beginning of the century, it was just taking hold in the field of architecture and design. The Red and Blue chair still represents to me the beginning of that story. Oh – it is also very comfortable to sit in!



Neil Mackenzie: Casala chair

After we finished our apartment we got a dose of furniture disease manifested by strong urges to trawl secondhand furniture shops every weekend. For dining chairs we vacillated between severe 50-year-old super-utilitarian gloss-white enamelled timber numbers, galvanized steel French cafe stools, or slightly odd Oz versions of Danish classics. In the end we were seduced by the elegant lines of the 1970s. We picked up the secondhand Casala dining chairs relatively cheaply. They embody a progressive 70s optimism – really comfortable and spacious, stackable, lightweight, with elegant considered curves – they make you want to sit longer after dinner. For me a dining chair should have arms to encourage you to pull the chair back from the table and slouch comfortably. These arms encourage you to follow the curve with your hand like stroking a groovy cat. The Casala Chair was designed by Alexander Begge, a German designer and plastics magician, and manufactured in Australia under license by Winton Plastics. These chairs can be left in the rain, will take wine spills, can be stood on to change a light globe and stack in the corner if needed. I love these chairs and think they still look great 30 years on.

Virginia Kerridge: Corona chair

I first saw this chair when I was driving down King Street in Newtown. There were two of them in the window of a secondhand shop that was closing down. I did a u-turn, parked the car, and went inside and bought them. I like their sculptural quality and the ability that you have while sitting on them to change your position from sitting cross-legged to being fully reclined, provided you have a footstool – the footstool is quite essential for the comfort factor! They were designed in the early 1960s by a Dane, Poul M. Volther. Their organic form has references to the human body with its skeletal form floating off the ground. I like the way they work spatially in a room as well – they don't clog the space and can look quite transparent from certain angles.