



Designer Profile: Studio 7.5 Berlin

When Mirra™ chair designers Burkhard Schmitz, Claudia Plikat, Nicolai Neubert, and Carola Zwick founded Studio 7.5 in Berlin, Germany, they were looking for freedom—freedom to work on projects that interested them, freedom from rules, roles, and titles.

And that’s pretty much how they’ve operated ever since. “There are no bosses here,” says the group, which also now includes Carola’s brother Roland. Preferring to be heard as a single voice, they continue, “Everybody does everything. That’s how we cultivate ideas and maintain our openness and curiosity.”

When they began their partnership in 1992, right after the unification of Germany, office space in Berlin was extremely hard to find, so they thought about taking another, freer route: renting a 7.5 ton truck that required no special permit to drive. “We thought we could put our model shop in it, and drive from project site to project site,” they explain. Thus, the name “Studio 7.5” was born. And although they didn’t actually do it—they were able to locate office space after all—the name stuck.

When designing products for clients like Herman Miller, Studio 7.5 moves quickly and smartly, too, progressing from the concept stage to the model shop, sometimes within a day or two, where they begin to create rough prototypes of the “thing,” whatever it may be.

And like kids let loose with a pile of clay, this is their favorite activity.

“You really have to work in three dimensions when designing products,” they say, “so we don’t spend much time on fancy renderings. Computer drawings just don’t give you the feel, the touch, the smell.”

And when disagreements come up—as they certainly must in such a collaborative endeavor—who has the final say? “We discuss the issue and we always try to let the best idea win,” they explain. “You’d think it would be complicated with four or five people, but if we have two people in an argument, the others can be referees who say, ‘You know, I think she’s right’ or ‘I think he’s right.’ So it actually makes it easier because you get more input.”

One thing they all agree on: They love designing furniture. “What’s so interesting about designing furniture as opposed to, say, a tape recorder, is that the designer who designs the recorder comes in last in the chain of command. It’s just the beautification or ‘packaging.’ With furniture, it’s far more holistic.”



They find designing office chairs in particular to be the most rewarding. “We define not only how a chair looks but how it performs, even down to the characteristics of the tilt. We’re very involved with its physical behavior, because beauty is not only what you see, it’s also what you feel.”

The joy the group derives from its work is obvious. As Burkhard, Nicolai, and Carola, who are also university professors, tell their students, “If you want to be rich, go work in a bank. If you want to be famous, go rob the bank. But if creating things is fun for you, become a designer and you’ll be a king. It’s the best profession in the world.”

Especially when you have the freedom to do it your way.

Studio 7.5 Designs for Herman Miller

Mirra™ chair

Puzzle™ workstation

Awards/Recognition

APEX Award for Puzzle workstation, New York, 1998

Goed Industriel Ontwerp + Milieukeur, The Netherlands, 1995

Roscoe Award Winner, New York, 1994

APEX Award, New York, 1994

CSD-Minerva Award, London, 1994

Design + Ecology Rat für Formgebung Frankfurt , Germany, 1993-94

Salon de Meuble Paris, France, 1993

M.I.T.I.-Award, Japan, 1992

IF Award Hannover, Germany, 1992