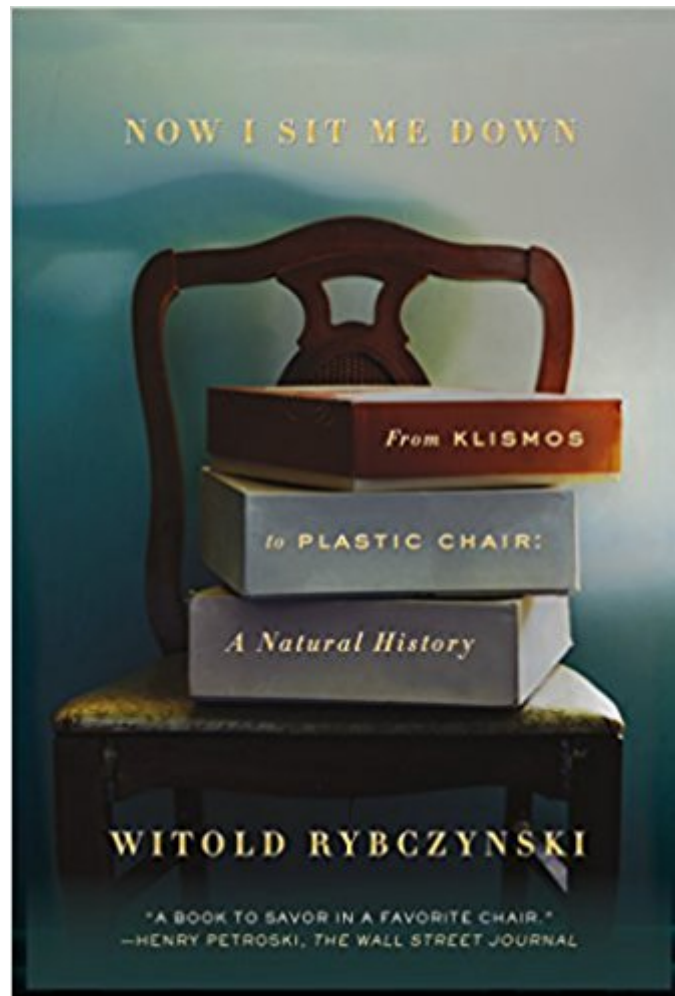




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Now I Sit Me Down: From Klismos To Plastic Chair: A Natural History



Synopsis

A grand tour of the chair through the ages by our foremost writer on design Have you ever wondered where rocking chairs came from, or why cheap plastic chairs are suddenly everywhere? In *Now I Sit Me Down*, the distinguished architect and writer Witold Rybczynski chronicles the history of the chair from the folding stools of pharaonic Egypt to the ubiquitous stackable monobloc chairs of today. He tells the stories of the inventor of the bentwood chair, Michael Thonet, and of the creators of the first molded-plywood chair, Charles and Ray Eames. He reveals the history of chairs to be a social history – of different ways of sitting, of changing manners and attitudes, and of varying tastes. The history of chairs is the history of who we are. We learn how the ancient Chinese switched from sitting on the floor to sitting in a chair, and how the iconic chair of Middle America – the BarcaLounger – traces its roots back to the Bauhaus. Rybczynski weaves a rich tapestry that draws on art and design history, personal experience, and historical accounts. And he pairs these stories with his own delightful hand-drawn illustrations: colonial rockers and English cabrioles, languorous chaise longues and no-nonsense ergonomic task chairs – they – are all here. The famous Danish furniture designer Hans Wegner once remarked, “A chair is only finished when someone sits in it.” As Rybczynski tells it, the way we choose to sit and what we choose to sit on speak volumes about our values, our tastes, and the things we hold dear.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Reprint edition (August 22, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0374537038

ISBN-13: 978-0374537036

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 0.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #186,102 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Houseware & Dining > Furniture](#) #24 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Decorative Arts & Design > Furniture Design](#) #224 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History](#)

Customer Reviews

“This is a book to savor in a favorite chair. Maybe you’ll even find the one you’re sitting in reflected in its pages: *Now I Sit Me Down* is charmingly illustrated with postage-stamp-size images of many of the chairs discussed—all drawn with obvious care by the author.”

—Henry Petroski, *The Wall Street Journal*

“Rybczynski adds another delightful volume to an already impressive shelf of books notable for formidable learning worn lightly and an infectious fascination with the way we craft the built environment . . . His prose has the engagingly conversational tone of an accomplished lecturer. You needn’t be a student of architecture or design to enjoy *Now I Sit Me Down*, but you will certainly come away knowing a lot more about the practices and principles that shaped chairs throughout history.”

—Wendy Smith, *The Boston Globe*

The book is a slim, insightful introduction to the piece of furniture that shapes not only the way we sit, but the way we live, too.

—Mark Medley, *The Globe and Mail*

“Whether describing the Egyptian stool or its surprising descendant, the Hollywood director’s chair, Rybczynski elegantly sums up the social trends and technological innovations that have conspired to change the way we sit . . . There is a tactile quality to the writing.”

—Amanda Kolsen Hurley, *Architect Magazine*

[Rybczynski is] a refreshing voice on the design writing scene.

—MiChelle Jones, *The Dallas Morning News*

“With wit, scholarship and perspective, Witold Rybczynski’s history of chairs and how we use them is a pure delight.”

—Shelf Awareness (starred review)

“Who knew sitting was so complicated? Or so fascinating? Rybczynski . . . has a special knack for making everyday objects and ideas seem captivating, in part because he places them in a larger historical narrative. In his telling, the chair becomes a seemingly immortal character traveling, *Forest Gump*-like, through the vicissitudes of our shared history.”

—Doug Childers, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“The chair becomes anything but everyday in Rybczynski’s discerning history . . . A worthy addition to Rybczynski’s well-regarded oeuvre, this cultured examination should be read in one’s favorite reading chair.”

—Booklist (starred review)

“Rybczynski is totally engaging in this smoothly flowing, sharp, witty narrative—another winner from a top-notch writer on design.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“[A] detailed and comprehensive history of the chair . . . Rybczynski’s relentless curiosity is easily transferred to the reader as he astutely zeroes in on the details of what makes a chair design special or significant. This latest contribution from Rybczynski serves as further evidence that he is one of the best writers on design working today.”

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

Witold Rybczynski is a writer and an emeritus professor of architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *How Architecture Works* and *Mysteries of the Mall* and has written about architecture and design for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and *Slate*. Among his award-winning books are *Home*, *The Most Beautiful House in the World*, and *A Clearing in the Distance*, which won the J. Anthony Lukas Prize. He is the winner of the 2007 Vincent Scully Prize and the 2014 Design Mind Award from the National Design Awards. He lives with his wife in Philadelphia.

A short but delightfully detailed history of chairs, imperial and lowly, gilded and plastic--with simple line drawings which enhance the information. It made me walk around the house critiquing my conglomeration of seating products. Author even cites *The Onion's* satirical claim that the US doesn't need to produce any more chairs, there are plenty available in houses and stores and garage sales. From French courts to IKEA, chair designers want to solve the simple problem of where to sit and how to make an inviting and attractive chair. Rybczynski distills their quest into this tight account.

An architect knows that little things mean a lot. This is a gem of a book. It's about chairs: their importance and their history. There is fascinating history behind the designs and designers... why chairs look (and sit) the way they do. I especially like the thumbnail biographies of the designers: the crafting and marketing of this household work of art and science that we take for granted. All is covered in a great story telling fashion.

This the 5th book I have read by this author and as with the previous 4 it was a pleasure. The author manages to distill an entire history of a particular subject into a enjoyable read for the most pedestrian historian. I plan to work my way through many more of his sizable works.

This is an interesting history of the development of chairs from ancient Egypt and China till our time. Unfortunately the book includes many verbal descriptions of various chairs without their pictures, and as a result these descriptions are not so clear.

Brief coverage of the subject with nice sketches of the chairs.

Gift.

This is a magazine article that has been padded and turned into a book. It is interesting but repetitive and pedantic at times - better editing/shaping the book might have helped. For the price many more illustrations should have been included.

Wide-ranging look at chairs.

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