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Design Collaborative: A New Classic

By Janet Wiens

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Successfully introducing a new product requires vision, time, extensive research and the right team. It's a complicated endeavor that becomes even more challenging when a company is looking at all its brands and its position in the marketplace. Kimball Office faced this scenario when it sought to develop and introduce a new seating product. The result of the company's effort is Adagiato—a sleek guest chair that is destined to become a classic.

"Adagiato is part of our concerted effort to give the A&D community products that have visual interest, value and a high level of craftsmanship," says Douglas Prickett, director of design for Kimball Office. "For several years we researched our brands and our position in the A&D marketplace. Adagiato is one of the first products in our effort to make a new design statement."

Kimball has been historically known for providing products with comfort and value, and Adagiato builds on these characteristics while meeting the demands of today's designers, according to Prickett. "Product life-cycles today are shorter and market needs are in a constant flux," he adds. "It's hard to fully know how a design will play out. We were intent on listening to our current and potential customers in an effort to develop a seating product that wouldn't be just another wood chair. We wanted a design with a classic appeal that would stand the test of time and conducted extensive research before developing the product charter for this offering. The information that we received through focus groups, one-on-one interviews and other avenues enabled us to establish a solid foundation for moving forward."



The product charter followed the organization's commitment to value and comfort while requiring a new look and an environmental focus that adheres to the company's corporate principles in this area. To help fulfill its vision, Kimball brought in industrial designer David Allan Pessa to collaborate on the product. "I worked with Kimball previously on the Delano Collection and I was pleased to be asked to partner with them again," says Pessa.

Before initial design work went very far, Pessa spent a lot of time on Kimball's factory floor to evaluate the company's manufacturing capabilities. He maintains that a designer must understand engineering and product design as well as the orientation of a component to a piece of equipment before he or she progresses very far with design development.

Months of sketching and evaluating materials and components led to the design of the mixedmedia guest chair. Pessa notes that the product plays to Kimball Office's core manufacturing strengths and understanding of wood, metal, and upholstery in a new and appealing way. "I have attended foreign furniture fairs for many years, and have come to appreciate the European sensibility regarding product design," notes Pessa. "Adagiato gave me the chance to engage in this sensibility of sublime design with an emphasis on scale, proportion and the inherent characteristics of the materials."

The product is extremely flexible when it comes to design options. Buyers may select from three backs: wood, a half-height back (lumbar) cushion, or a full-height back cushion. Upholstery options include Kimball fabrics and leathers,

Alliance Program upholsteries, and a customer's own material or leather. The 18 available wood finishes range from deep shades to warm light tones. Rounding out the palette of options are finish choices for the steel legs and undercarriage in cinder, platinum metallic, and satin nickel metallic.

But Adagiato isn't just about looking good. In fact, its name relates to being comfortable in Italian and Pessa says that the chair's comfort is what really makes it special. He points to the fact that the product was designed and engineered to sit "into" rather than "onto." The increased slope, back pitch and fullysuspended seat deck for increased long-term comfort make this a chair that will make long meetings much more bearable. Factor in the elliptical, compounded and contoured profile of the wood arms, which provide an increased comfort plane for the user while offering greater forearm support, and you have a chair that successfully fuses design and comfort.

In keeping with Kimball Office's environmental stewardship, the chair's materials, components and manufacturing processes were of key importance. Adagiato is GREENGUARD™-certified for indoor air quality, making it an appropriate choice for companies and designers seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) certification.

According to Prickett, Adagiato has been very well received since being introduced at NeoCon® in 2006. He reports that sales are good across multiple market segments, indicating that customers are impressed with its well crafted and progressive, yet timeless, design. Further validation came from the Chicago Athenaeum: Museum of Architecture and Design, which bestowed a Good Design® Award on Adagiato while also placing the chair in its permanent collection.