

GURA

Design After Modernism  
FURNITURE AND INTERIORS 1970 — 2010

NORTON

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JUDITH GURA



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With the first decade of the twenty-first century behind us, it is time to reassess the concept of "modern," a term that dates to the Middle Ages, when it signified current or recent events. Not until the eighteenth century did it become a stylistic term; more recently it has generally referred to the aesthetic that evolved from the Bauhaus and flourished in the mid-twentieth century. Though proclaiming freedom from the limitations of style, it became as formulaic as most of its predecessors, as Modern architecture and furnishings conformed to prescribed specifications: geometric forms, industrially fabricated, unadorned, and studiously ahistorical.

Those guidelines are no longer relevant. As Midcentury Modernism has receded into history, Modernism has been redefined, reenergized, and in the process transformed. Today it embraces a cornucopia of design in an almost limitless range of materials: design studios are laboratories for experimentation; design concepts can be as important as finished objects; and furniture has crossed barriers to become a new art form. Tools and technologies never before possible have provided new approaches to decoration, and may incorporate influences from the past. The design profession has broadened its horizons; interiors and furniture are being created by architects, interior designers, furniture makers, industrial designers, artisans, artists, and even fashion designers.

*Design After Modernism* offers an overview of developments in design over the past four decades—some evolutionary, some expected, and some extraordinary. It identifies the diverse influences that have generated new directions in design and illustrates many of the most characteristic, most noteworthy, and most innovative objects in this rich and variegated mix. All are representative of their time, and many of the earlier

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designs have already gained iconic status. Of the more recent ones, whether or not they will be admired in decades to come is something that only time will tell.



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Judith Gura is a professor at the New York

School of Interior Design, where she directs the design history program and is coordinator of public programs. A graduate of Cornell University, she has a master's degree in the history of the decorative arts from the Bard Graduate Center. She has worked on exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, the Whitney Museum, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Her published works include *New York Interior Design, 1935–1985*; *Sourcebook of Scandinavian Furniture*; *Guide to Period Styles for Interiors*; *Harvey Prober: Modernist Furniture, Artworks and Design*; and *Eduard Wormley: The Other Face of Modernism*. She is a contributing editor for *Art+Auction* and lectures frequently on interior design and furniture styles.

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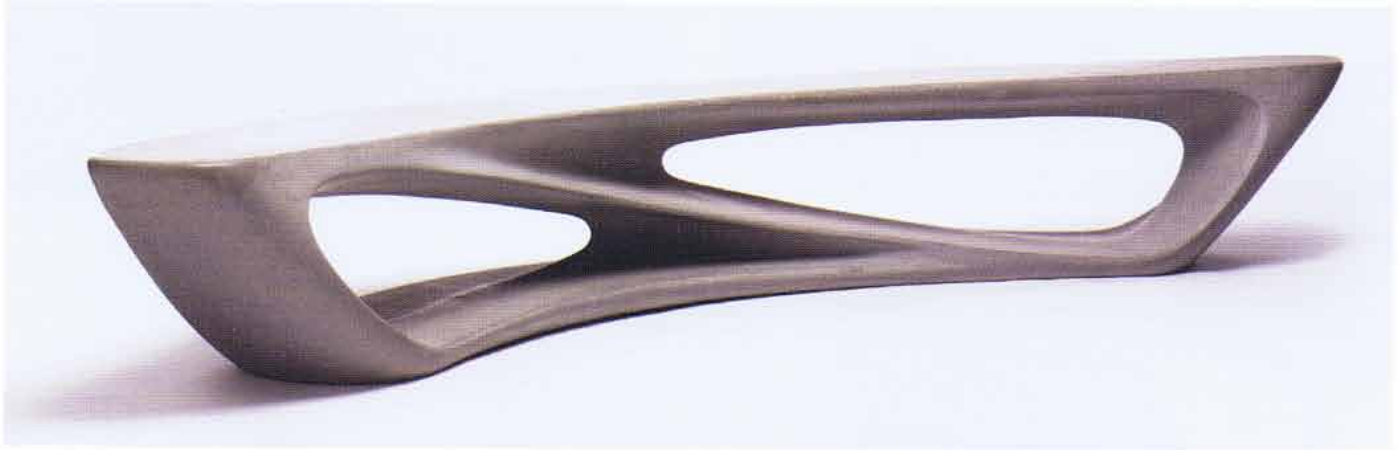
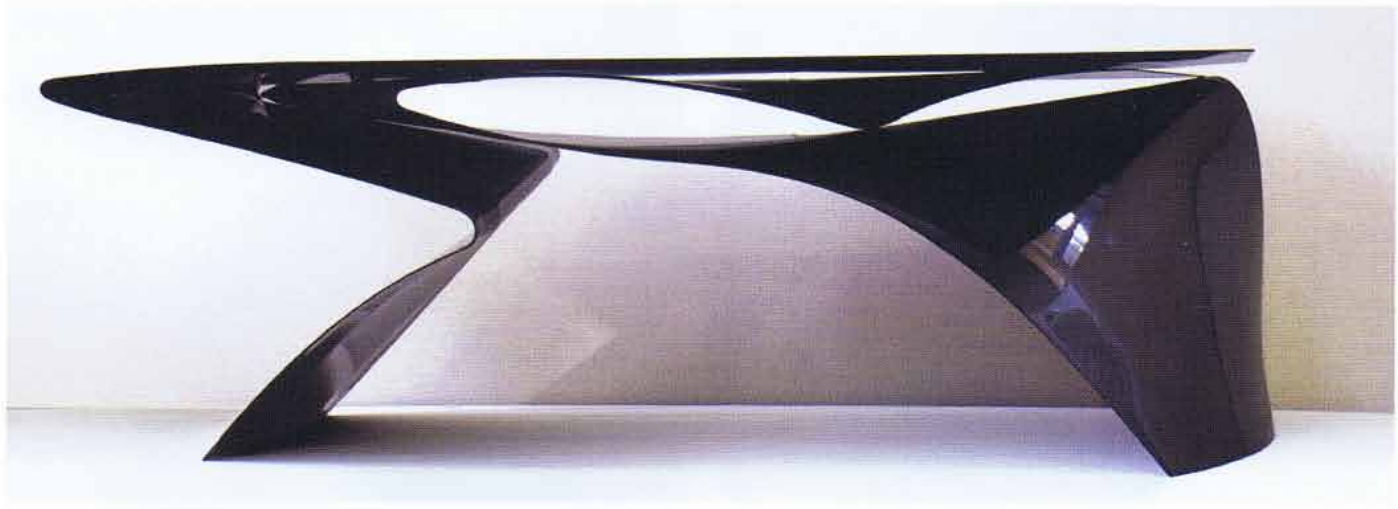
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**Side Line Table**

Philip Michael Wolfson (United States)  
2009  
Carbon fiber  
Made in a limited edition of four.

**Drift Concrete, Amanda Levene**

(United Kingdom)  
2006  
Cement, crushed white limestone  
A fluid form designed with computer technology, here translated into an unexpected material, was originally executed in high-gloss-finish polyurethane. Levene, an architect, worked for Richard Rogers and was a partner in the innovative Future Systems practice before opening her own office in 2009.

**Cloud, Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec**

(France)  
2004  
Polyethylene  
A variation on the use of joined multiples.

Holl, Thomas Mayne, and others have produced electrifying structures—many of them museums—that take architecture to a new level. Buildings need no longer be passive enclosures; they can harness solar energy, recycle waste and water, and con-



**10-Unit System, Shigeru Ban (Japan)**  
2009

UPM ProFi wood-plastic composite

A single L-shape component, the basis of a unique modular system, is used to assemble this chair as well as other furniture forms. It is made from a new composite material of recycled paper and plastic, environmentally sustainable and recyclable. Ban, an internationally known architect, is best known for his “Curtain Wall” house (1995) and his highly original use of cardboard tubes for architectural structures.



trol illumination. In addition to such practical considerations, “smart houses” can boast more esoteric features: walls that extend or retract, change color or opacity on command, adapt to variations in climate, project images or pattern, even emit scent—responding to the occupant’s needs by means of a central computerized control. And they can do all this while being ecologically considerate. Though not always related to the design of interiors, such architecture cannot help but influence them, demanding equally assertive treatments—or self-effacingly noncompetitive ones.

**Origami Chair, Philip Michael Wolfson (United States)**  
2007

Gold-leafed acid-patinated sheet steel  
Skillfully folded and golden-surfaced, steel here becomes the most elegant of materials—made in an edition of eight. An American architect now based in London, he worked with Zaha Hadid on a number of projects before establishing his own practice in 1991. Influenced by the Italian Modernists, Wolfson manipulates hard-edged materials like metal into fluid sculptural

forms or translates computer-drawn silhouettes in carbon fiber for furniture that is also sculpture.

## CONTEXT: THE FIRST DECADE

The new century opened in a state of disequilibrium, with the collapse of the dot-com industry, the aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, and China's explosive emergence as a world power. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, genocide in Africa, and the tragedy of September 11 made the first decade one of political disruption and economic uncertainty. As it drew to a close, international conflict and widespread recession suggested that a return to earlier, more optimistic times would not be easy, or even possible. The stresses of real life led to escapist fantasy and revival styles—in fashion, theater, film, and music—as technology continued to transform virtually every aspect of public and private life. Technology interceded in human interaction as email, texting, Facebook, and Twitter supplanted face-to-face, even voice-to-voice, communication. For its youngest generations, society was becoming increasingly depersonalized, or at least transposed into a new dimension in cyberspace. A cornucopia of unrelated design styles reflected this fragmented world and the need to find some means of expressing individuality and emotion.

Despite the drawbacks of the digital age, continuing advances in computer engineering have opened possibilities that stagger the imagination, leading designers to become explorers in search of new forms, new materials, and new techniques with which to translate need into object. Their achievements are reflected not only in the implements of everyday life—"smart" phones, electronic readers, hybrid cars, and more—but also in visionary architecture, interiors, furniture, and lighting. Sophisticated software and space-age materials enable architects and designers to execute almost anything that a fertile imagination can conceive: ingenious forms and structures never before possible, in materials only recently invented, to use in reconfiguring the past or inventing the future.

**Why/Why Not**, Philip Michael Wolfson (United States)  
2009  
LG Hi-Mac acrylic, mirror  
From an edition of eight.

**Flora**, Tord Boontje (Netherlands)  
2009  
Sheet metal, stainless steel or copper

