



**CRAFTING FURNITURE
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:
CONTEMPORARY
PRACTICES, HISTORIES
AND FUTURES**

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**DESIGN
HISTORY
SOCIETY**

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SYMPOSIUM AIMS

Furniture occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of craft, design, architecture, and everyday life. In regions across South and Southeast Asia and the wider Global South, furniture-making has long mediated relationships between local material cultures, artisanal knowledge systems, colonial and postcolonial histories, and global markets. Yet contemporary furniture design from these contexts remains underrepresented within dominant design history narratives, museum collections, and critical discourse.

This symposium, co-convened by Dr Rukmini Chaturvedi and the DHS, aims to critically examine contemporary furniture design through the lens of craft, with particular attention to practices, objects, and discourses emerging from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the broader Global South. It seeks to foreground furniture as a site where questions of authorship, labour, material knowledge, identity, modernity, and global circulation are negotiated and contested.

The following panels will interrogate how contemporary designers, craftspeople, studios, and manufacturers engage with craft traditions, whether through continuity, transformation, disruption, or strategic reinvention, and how these engagements are framed, mediated, and valued locally and internationally. The symposium aims to challenge Western-centric canons of furniture and design history by centring materially grounded, object-led, and decolonial approaches.

PANEL ONE: COLONIAL OBJECTS, MATERIAL HISTORIES & EXTRACTION

Reclaiming Women in Post-Independence Indian Design and Craft

This paper examines the role of women in shaping modern Indian furniture and craft practices between 1947 and 1990, situating their work within the intertwined histories of nationalism, craft revival, and institutional formation in post-Independence India. Focusing on designers such as Leela Shiveshwarkar and Minnie Boga, it explores how furniture operated at the intersection of craft, architecture, domesticity, and nation-building in the decades following Independence.

While modern Indian design has often been framed through architectural modernism, the contributions of women designers and cultural entrepreneurs remain largely absent from dominant design histories. Drawing on archival research and feminist historiography, this presentation highlights women who worked across studio furniture, small-scale production, craft collaboration, and institution building. Within a newly sovereign nation invested in cultural self-definition, these practitioners negotiated vernacular traditions, artisanal knowledge systems, and global modernist vocabularies.

Furniture in this context functioned not merely as domestic object but as a material articulation of identity, self-reliance, and modern living. Through workshops and collaborations with craftspeople, women designers reinterpreted regional material cultures while contributing to emerging design discourse, including platforms such as *Design*, India's first dedicated design magazine. Yet their labour has frequently been rendered invisible; subsumed under architectural authorship, institutional narratives, or nationalist frameworks. By foregrounding furniture as an object-led methodology, this paper argues for a rethinking of post-Independence Indian design history that recognises women not as peripheral contributors but as central agents in shaping its material and cultural modernity.

Arpna Gupta is an independent design historian and curator, and the founder of Create Culture, a practice working at the intersection of design, craft, and communities. Through exhibitions, collaborative projects, design residencies, and workshops, Create Culture supports Indian designers, designer-makers, and master craftspeople. She holds an M.A. in Curating Contemporary Design from Kingston University in partnership with the Design Museum. With over a decade of experience in contemporary design, Arpna's research focuses on women in Indian design and post-Independence design practices. Raised in India, she has lived and worked internationally, and previously founded Pecha Kucha Night Oslo, a leading design forum in Norway.

Portuguese Modern Design and the Contemporary Materialities of the Empire

This article examines the materialities of the Portuguese Empire in everyday furniture, raising questions about the relationship between extractive material ecology in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique and furniture in post-war Portugal. In the post-war years, public buildings and middleclass houses were characterized by furnishings mostly made of tropical woods. African timber was extracted, processed, and shipped from the colonies to the metropole, where it was primarily used in the production of furniture and in interior design. Renowned Portuguese companies, such as Olaio, produced a wide range of design products from African woods, contributing to furnishing both the private and public dimensions of the Empire and to developing a modern lifestyle in Portugal.

On the one hand, by drawing from the analysis of iconic pieces of design that shaped the history of furniture in Portugal and that are still in use in public and private spaces and, on the other hand, by examining the imperial trade of timber in the post-war period, this article raises questions about the relationship between Empires and the design industry, between furniture making and the transimperial economy, and between the Global North and South regarding furniture.

Based on archival materials from Portuguese manufacturers, architects, and designers, as well as documentation from colonial archives regarding timber trade, this article simultaneously highlights the place of production and the point of consumption of modern design. In doing so, it challenges the Western-centric history of design in the post-war era that has minimized the connection between modern design and extractive material ecology in the Global South. The Portuguese case study is treated as a pilot subject matter to broaden the discussion to other European countries about the interdependence between modern design and imperial projects, questioning what remains of this legacy today both in the history and practice of furniture making.



Francesca Vita is a post-doctoral researcher at DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte within the ERC project "Architecture, Colonialism and Labour" coordinated by Ana Vaz Milheiro, and an invited lecturer in interior design at the University of the Algarve. She holds a PhD in Architecture (cum laude, 2023) from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, which deepens into the topics of colonial legacy and domestic space in contemporary Guinea-Bissau. In 2022, she was awarded with the Eleni Bastea Award (IASTE). Her research interests include domestic architecture, the entanglement between the built environment, design and natural resources, the production of arts and crafts know-how during late colonialism and their legacy nowadays.

The Gilded Salons of Contemporary Egyptian Homes

This paper examines the history and contemporary meaning of *al-salon-al-mudhab* - the gilded 'neo-rococo' salon furniture set that has furnished formal guest rooms in Egyptian homes of different social classes since the early twentieth century. These salons are either admired, mocked as outdated, or dismissed as inauthentic (post)colonial imitations of the European colonizer - the most undesired guest. They are rooms that are loved and hated, intimate and formal/legitimizing, rarely used and overly maintained, relevant yet increasingly obsolete. Drawing on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork in Cairo, Alexandria, and the furniture-making city of Damietta, the paper traces how gilded salon furniture emerged through the encounter between European workshop traditions and local craft practices. Early twentieth-century furniture workshops run by *khawagat* (foreign craftsmen) trained Egyptian workers in the production of *ifrangi* (European-style) furniture, while local artisans adapted carving, plaster ornamentation, and decorative techniques to create hybrid forms that circulated widely across Egyptian homes. By mid-century, Damietta had become a major centre of furniture production, where workshops reinterpreted European rococo and baroque aesthetics through local craft economies and material knowledge.

Rather than treating these objects as mere stylistic borrowings, the paper approaches the gilded salon as a site where questions of local authenticity, labour, and social legitimacy are negotiated. Several craftsmen recount how Egyptian-carved neo-rococo chairs and sofas are exported to Europe unfinished, where they are completed and marketed as European-made products. The journey of these objects exposes the persistent hierarchies through which craft labour from the Global South is obscured in the making of "European" design. With the guest room as its focus, this paper concludes by reflecting on the uneven politics of hospitality: the neo-colonial borders that continue to determine who remains a perpetual host and who can arrive as the celebrated guest who will go on to romanticize "Oriental" hospitality.



Lina El-Shamy is a cultural anthropologist, design historian, and artist. Lina's research concerns the tensions and frictions of everyday life in contemporary Egypt, especially as those relate to domestic space and objects. Her work is driven by the prospect of recovering alternative (epistemological) worlds that could redraft ways of relating and belonging. She holds a Bachelor of Design from Ontario College of Art and Design University, and an MA and PhD from the University of Toronto's Department of Art History. Lina was born in Alexandria, Egypt, grew up in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and immigrated to Canada at age 15, making her life an Ibn-Battutian one full of shifting landscapes and perpetual curiosity. She currently teaches at Parsons School of Design in New York City.

From Lanna Woodcarving to Danish Modern: Tracing the Legacy of Colonial Teak Dispositif

Teak (*Tectona grandis*) is perceived in design history as the exquisite material of Mid-Century Modernism. While Danish Modern's aesthetic is celebrated for its organic humanism, its material biography, however, is rooted in the tropical deciduous forests of South and Southeast Asia—a site of systematic colonial exploitation, labor displacement, and territorial annexation. My research project maps the sociotechnical networks of teak circulation, tracing its journey from the resource frontiers of Northern Thailand (Lanna) to the industrial core of Denmark.

By employing 'material biography' as a global design narrative, the study transcends the prevailing national histories of design. The historiographic methodology aims to evoke the agency of the material and its habitat. I argue that the transatlantic discursive and material success of Danish Modernism was facilitated by a colonial teak dispositif—a strategic ensemble of scientific forestry, Siamese modern state apparatus, and Danish logistical infrastructure. This apparatus de-territorialised teak in its indigenous locality from the sacred being and the class-restricted usage into a global valued commodity.

The presentation with the symposium contrasts the emergence of the commodification of Lanna woodcarving (1950s-1990s) with the temporally overlapping adoption of teak in Danish Modernism (1930s-1960s). Facilitated by governmental import liberalisation, Danish designers and cabinetmakers utilised teak's globally recognised quality and extensive quantities, benefiting from established production and logistical infrastructure and an oversupply of harvested strategic timber. Lanna agrarian craftsmen relied on community-transferred tacit knowledge and locally available materials, navigating a landscape shaped by the legacy of uneven and exploitative core-periphery relations with Bangkok as a proximate economic centre and rising environmental concern. The presentation proposes a shifting view of material beyond as a projected plane of designers, but as an actant entangled within a global violent asymmetric assemblage.



Originally from Thailand, **Metini Krivanish** holds a degree in Journalism from Chiang Mai University. Her Master's research investigated the 'Werkbund Crate' (Werkbundkiste) as a didactic instrument of the German Design Council, analysing its role in knowledge and discourse transfer of 'good design' within the rising consumer culture of 1950s-1980s in West Germany. Having practiced design in both Bangkok and Berlin, she is currently developing her PhD dissertation. Her research employs a teak material biography, tracing its entangled colonial legacies that connect Danish Modernism with the commodification of Lanna woodcarving.

Portuguese Colonial Legacies: Reading material histories through furniture on the Konkan Coast of India

This research investigates the material histories of furniture during the Portuguese colonial times on the Konkan coast of India. The furniture crafted during this time displays colonial histories of negotiation, intersection, and adaptation, shaped by trade, migration, and Portuguese rule. This research is contextualised in Goa, providing important evidence to trace the material histories of furniture. Goa was ruled by the Portuguese from 1510 to 1961, where art, architecture, language, and literature reflect colonial influences. These influences often present a European and regional intermix through styles and iconography. Scholarship on Indo-Portuguese reveals design overlaps in art and architecture, but very few discuss furniture and wood practices during the colonial period in Goa. They often overlook how furniture has transformed during colonial encounters beyond the styles and visuals. This paper aims to explore the material, technical, and stylistic overlaps and intersections arising through cultural negotiations.



Tejaswini Bedekar is a doctoral researcher and assistant professor at Srishti Manipal Institution of Art, Design and Technology, MAHE, Bangalore. Her work examines woodcraft and furniture practices along the Konkan coast of India. Trained in interior design with a specialisation in building craft from CEPT University, Ahmedabad, her research explores how materials, techniques, and embodied practices have evolved through colonial and postcolonial encounters. Her work brings together measured drawing, archival research, and object-based analysis to study furniture as a material record of cultural exchange and adaptation. By focusing on joinery, construction logic, and craft practices, her research contributes to broader discussions in design history and craft studies about material knowledge, hybridity, and the historical transformation of making traditions.

Dr Priya Joseph is an architect, writer, and educator. She holds a PhD in architecture and teaches at Srishti Manipal Institution of Art, Design and Technology, MAHE, Bangalore. Her work focuses on material culture and design, history, and theory of architecture, especially focused on material-tectonics, gender-ecology-design, urbanism and using drawing as a method of not just representation but also reflection. She has taught earlier at the Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, and at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland, within the IN:CH project. She is the co-founder of The Living Studio Architects which has designed numerous buildings in earth, in South India. Priya has recently won the Prestigious Jeffrey Cook Award for Exceptional Scholarship by IASTE, a consortium of the University of California for her research on Terracotta Tiles. Her recent book is titled 'Brick Architecture Craft in Nineteenth Century South India: Reading Buildings as Archives,' published by Routledge, London. She has written for Economic and Political Weekly, Domus, Traditional Dwellings and Settlement Review, and UNESCO Sahapedia, among others.

Writing Design Histories through Vernacular Furniture: Methods, Mappings and Museological Futures

This paper examines the “Vernacular Furniture of North-West India” (2015-2025) as an extended, multi-phased project exploring methodologies for writing design histories through the study of vernacular furniture. Employing mobile mapping, typological analysis, drawing, and collaborative museology, the research was led by the Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC) at CEPT University and the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection (SADACC) in the UK. The project was structured into three phases—Gujarat (Phase I), Rajasthan (Phase II), and Punjab and Haryana (Phase III)—with a unified aim of identifying, mapping, and analysing furniture integral to both everyday and ceremonial contexts across homes, public spaces, and institutions. In total, the research team traversed over 62,000 km, visited 429 locations, and documented 7,886 pieces of vernacular furniture, culminating in the identification of 167 distinct typologies. Methodologically, the project integrated four core operations: the identification and mapping of furniture, the collection of ethnographic narratives, the analysis of craft and the active use of the assembled collection as a research and educational resource.

This paper contends that treating research on vernacular furniture as both method and subject—through mapped objects, narrated artefacts, crafted assemblies, and curatorial resources—enables new approaches to writing design histories that remain accountable to specific places, communities, and practices. By foregrounding typologies such as Aasan, Manch, Manjush, Sapaat, and Vastu, along with the localised knowledge embedded within them, the project illustrates how quotidian objects can recalibrate museum collections, information infrastructures, and pedagogical models. The research thus invites further collaborative, object-centred investigations into furniture and craft traditions across the Global South.



Jay Thakkar is a Professor at the Faculty of Design and Head of Exhibitions at CEPT University. He is also the Co-founder and Ex-Director of the Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC) CRDF, India. He established DICRC to conduct research and bring innovation to India's traditional building craft sector. He has taught for the past 20 years and is actively functioning in the creative and cultural industry. He has worked on various art, design, and craft projects in India, Europe, and Australia. He has developed one of South Asia's largest data resources on vernacular furniture. He is passionate about art-craft-design collaboration and through various design ventures, exhibitions, academic studios and research projects he brings these creative disciplines together.

A chair is a chair is a chair is a chair: Use-based furniture history as an anti-colonial techniques

Designed to furnish the planned post-independence capital of the Indian Punjab, modernist furniture from the city of Chandigarh has taken the world by storm. From the pages of The New York Times and Wall Street Journal to dentist's offices and restaurants in New York, and from Kim Kardashian and Kanye West's Calabasas mansion to prints on designer clothing, the bulky, angular forms of Chandigarh's modernist furniture are now hard to miss. Popular narratives of the furniture, told in glossy full-color coffee table books and re-told by the design and popular press highlight the pieces' design by Pierre Jeanneret, the supposed 'neglect' of this furniture by Chandigarh residents and government officials, and the 'saving' of Chandigarh's modern design heritage by French dealers and wealthy design collectors. As a result of this narrative, these now iconic objects have been transformed from Chandigarh Chairs to "Jeanneret Chairs," from utilitarian furniture to pieces of high design, and from embodiments of Indian design to items residing solidly in the European modernist design canon (Seitz et.al, 2022). Understanding such effects to be harmful, this paper proposes leveraging histories and realities of use as a tool to build more truthful and resolutely anti-colonial histories and present realities of designed objects (Feldman, 2024; Henderson, 2020). By detailing, emphasizing and encouraging normal day-to-day use of Chandigarh's furniture we can undermine suggestions that Chandigarh's residents have not appropriately appreciated the city's furniture, help ensure that those for whom these pieces were created maintain access to them, and aid in the recategorization of Chandigarh's modernism as a part of Indian - not European - design history (Holtorf and Bolin, 2024; Fekrsanati and Marçal, 2022).



Petra Seitz is a design and architectural historian exploring the political economy of architecture and design. She holds a PhD from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, and a MA in History of Design from the RCA/V&A. Petra has taught at the University of Greenwich and the Bartlett School of Architecture, alongside work as a founder and primary investigator on the Chandigarh Chairs project.

Nia Thandapani is an independent designer and design historian. Her work focuses on colonial and post-independence design in the Indian subcontinent and the United Kingdom and engages with imperialism's presence within museum and heritage spaces, and its impact on design practice and its outcomes.

Gregor Wittrick is an Assistant Collection Manager at the British Museum and an independent design historian. In both strands of work he is interested in the technical and human aspects of production, particularly in furniture. He holds a BA in Three Dimensional Design from Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen, and an MA in History of Design from the Victoria & Albert Museum and Royal College of Art, London.

PANEL TWO: GLOBAL CIRCULATIONS & MATERIAL ECONOMIES

Rattan Relations: Craft, Materiality, and Furniture Design in Southeast Asia

This paper addresses the call to examine furniture-making practices in the Global South by focusing on rattan furniture design and production in Southeast Asia. Rattan represents a critical yet underexplored material within furniture design history, shaped by colonial extraction whilst offering contemporary makers a means to navigate craft knowledge, ecological responsibility, and global design relevance. Employing material culture and transnational design history approaches, this paper traces rattan's transformation from local material to global commodity through furniture design and production from the 20th century to present. I analyse various rattan furniture objects to trace networks of cultivation, trade, and craftsmanship that developed around this versatile plant material. I will first outline the historical ecology of rattan harvesting in Southeast Asia, examining indigenous practices, regional craft traditions, and colonial trade networks that facilitated the export of raw rattan and finished products to Europe and America. The Peacock/Bilibid chair serves as a case study to investigate how rattan furniture was shaped by colonial penal labour in the Philippines while producing enduring tropical imaginaries in Euro-America.

The paper then focuses on the works of contemporary Indonesian furniture designers Imam Buchori Zainuddin and Alvin Tjitrowirjo. Their works place a focus on collaboration with craft communities, attention to materiality, and experimentation with form. These case studies illustrate how contemporary designers are engaging with rattan to reflect, and at times rupture, historical continuities in material politics, value perceptions, and industry demands, revealing tensions between craft authenticity and design innovation, regional identity and international visibility. By examining rattan furniture through a decolonial lens, this research aims to challenge dominant design histories through material-centred approaches that centre Southeast Asian perspectives. Rattan furniture design offers a productive lens for understanding how Global South designers negotiate material histories whilst asserting cultural agency within global design networks.

Seet Yun Teng is Assistant Curator, Design, at the Asian Civilisations Museum Singapore. She received her MA in Material and Visual Culture (Anthropology) from University College London, with a background in visual art practice and art history. She has worked curatorially across a range of cultural platforms and art institutions, including NTU Centre of Contemporary Art Singapore and Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film. Her research examines contemporary design practices in Asia with a focus on Southeast Asia, particularly in product and furniture design, and the intersections of design, craft, technology, and materiality.

Renewable by Origin, Unsustainable by Design: Bio-based Plastics and Furniture from Brazil

In 2011, Brazilian petrochemical giant Braskem launched I'm Green™ bio-based polyethylene – a sugarcane-derived plastic positioned as a renewable, carbon-negative alternative to fossil-fuel polymers. Widely adopted across Brazilian industry, the material found its way into the furniture sector through a partnership with Tramontina, one of Brazil's largest household goods manufacturers, resulting in two chair designs: the Jet and the Paco. Both products are marketed as environmentally progressive, leveraging the ethical provenance of their material to signal sustainability to domestic and international consumers.

This paper interrogates those claims. Drawing on comparative environmental analysis, it examines whether the Jet and Paco chairs deliver meaningfully better ecological outcomes than their equivalent models produced from conventional fossil-derived polypropylene, and how they perform against other chairs manufactured using post-consumer recycled plastics or alternative bioplastic compounds. The findings are instructive: while bio-based polyethylene carries genuine carbon sequestration benefits at the point of material production, these gains are substantially complicated – and in some scenarios negated – by factors including end-of-life infrastructure, design longevity, material and production energy intensity, and the absence of recyclability within existing waste streams.

The paper argues that the I'm Green™ case exemplifies a broader tendency within Global South furniture design to locate sustainability within the ethical status of a single material input, displacing scrutiny from the wider systems in which objects are embedded. In doing so, it challenges the credibility of material-origin narratives as sufficient proxies for sustainable design practice, and calls for more rigorous, object-led, whole-lifecycle thinking. Positioned within debates on sustainability, representation, and global markets, this contribution uses Brazilian mass-produced furniture as a lens through which to examine how sustainability is constructed, communicated, and sold – and to whom.



Geoff Isaac is a Research Fellow at the University of Technology Sydney and casual academic at the Australian National University. His doctoral research examined the plastic chair's eighty-year history and contemporary sustainable transitions, published as *Rethinking Plastics in Product Design* (Bloomsbury, 2025). Isaac's first monograph, tracking the career of Australian mid-century industrial designer Grant Featherston was published by Thames and Hudson in 2017. His research interests include design history, material culture, environmental humanities, and the social and ecological implications of plastics.

Punjab Woodwork

This paper speaks to two subtopics of this symposium: 'Colonial legacies and postcolonial furniture forms: materials, and typologies' and 'Craft labour, collaboration, and hierarchy: designers, craftspeople, workshops, and intermediaries.' Using transregional and transcultural lenses, this paper will explore how we can understand the processes of making works of furniture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By looking at visual and archival materials on woodworkers from the northwest regions, mostly from pre-Partitioned Punjab, I will analyse how these furniture pieces circulated within different scales and regimes by critically looking at the meanings of furniture in vernacular and English glossaries.

Keeping in mind the institutions that were involved in the making, education, and exhibiting of the furniture and woodwork produced in the region, this paper explores how changing tastes transformed the methods of making and teaching about woodwork and furniture at the schools of art. Given the regional availability of raw materials and knowledge of woodwork that went into the vernacular or everyday living furniture of the regions, the shift in taste also informed what was produced for the 'local' and 'international' buyers.

By exploring available visual sources - photographs, artworks, and exhibition catalogues - this paper will argue that the colonial legacies of extraction and art education were entangled and informed by what Pamela H. Smith calls 'artisanal epistemologies' tied to local craftspeople and artisans. By taking a specific form tied to both institutions and local craftspeople, this paper extends its analysis by examining artisanal forms of knowledgekeeping to show how woodwork, as a form of making (Tim Ingold), also underwent a shift both inside and outside artisanal workshops and the homes of the region.



Tanya Talwar is a PhD student at the Institute of Art and Visual History at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. My doctoral thesis (soon to be defended) is an investigation into the transregionality of art education through the four schools of art in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, and Lahore (c. 1850-1947). The work focuses on student productions from the four schools of art to explore how alternative spaces and 'artisanal epistemologies' (P. Smith) informed artistic and artisanal forms of making within and beyond the art schools.

Material Culture and Colonial Design: A Study of Furniture at Pattani Archives

This proposal examines colonial-era furniture preserved at the Pattani Archives, Bhavnagar, as evidence of cultural exchange, design adaptation, and intergenerational memory. The presentation begins with an overview of the furniture housed at the Pattani Archives, tracing its history and its present role within archival space. Using object analysis as methodology, the study focuses on four key objects: an Edwardian-era barrister bookcase made by Mistry Nagji Purshottam, an intergenerational study desk used by children of Pattani family, a set of revolving bookshelves resembling John Danner's patented "Champion Case", and a marble-top table combining European aesthetics with Indian inlay craftsmanship.

Through this analysis, the presentation poses the questions: What do these furniture pieces tell us about the wider history of colonial design and Indian craftsmanship? How are these objects preserved in family members' memories? How were Western techniques adopted and adapted locally? And how is the design of the furniture and its functionalities remain relevant today? Our inquiry treats these pieces not merely as static décor but as active archival evidence reflecting domestic routines, educational discipline, and institutional authority. Moreover, it documents the understanding of the archivists, hailing from different disciplines such as history, archaeology and museology. The proposal resulting from their cross-sectoral dialogues reflects the process to investigate these stories, the challenges they faced, their methodology of research and their learning from this experience.

By combining these aspects, the presentation highlights a key challenge: the limited availability of scholarly material in Gujarati and other regional languages. At the same time, it proposes a practice-based approach that draws on cultural memory and lived experience to interpret these objects. Overall, the presentation aims to highlight the role of local craftsmanship in the design of these objects and the need to incorporate broader conversations on material culture, design history and the human stories embedded in these objects.



Aashka Kamdar is an Archival Assistant at Pattani Archives, with B.A in Archaeology and MA in Managing Archeological Sites. Aashka's research interests are in heritage interpretation, digital heritage, archival documentation of regional narratives. At Pattani Archives, they research these topics through archival documentation and cataloguing.

Shevang Berani is an Archival Assistant at Pattani Archives. Shevang completed their schooling in the Gujarati medium and pursued higher education in History. Through their work, they are learning archival practices and developing interests in documentation, heritage interpretation, and digital heritage through hands-on archival work

PANEL THREE: CRAFT, LABOUR & DISTRIBUTED MAKING

Remaking Authorship in the Bazaar: Craft Labour, Copying, and Furniture Design in Urban Pakistan

This paper explores small furniture workshops in urban Pakistani bazaars as vital yet often overlooked sites of contemporary design. In these cramped, noisy spaces, master craftspeople and apprentices copy, repair, disguise, and transform existing furniture into “new” pieces for local customers. Rather than treating their work as derivative or counterfeit, the paper follows these makers’ everyday decisions to show how labour hierarchies, skill transmission, and shared authorship actually play out on the workshop floor. Copying, in this context, is bound up with longer histories of colonial furniture circulation, aspirational middle-class modernity, and the circulation of Western styles through catalogues, digital platforms, and imported secondhand goods. As these references encounter local material constraints and economic pressures, forms are bent and stretched: functions shift, ornament mutates, and familiar typologies become hybrid or even “deformed.” Authorship becomes collective, obscured, and strategically flexible, allowing workshops to navigate both customer expectations and uneven power relations.

The paper pays particular attention to practices of concealment, such as recladding old frames to pass them off as new - to probe questions of value, authenticity, and trust in the bazaar. These tactics reveal how craftspeople balance survival, aspiration, and ethical ambiguity in a sector increasingly squeezed by mass-produced and flat-pack furniture. Drawing on design anthropology and decolonial design histories, the study shows how these workshops unsettle neat distinctions between designer and artisan, original and copy, modern and traditional. It argues that bazaar furniture makers should be recognised not as peripheral imitators but as active producers of design knowledge whose work demands a reframing of contemporary furniture discourse.

Dr. Ufaq Inaam is a design historian and educator whose work bridges vernacular design, design history, and ethnographic research on postcolonial visual cultures and infrastructures. She is currently senior scientist and post-doctoral researcher in Design History and Theory at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, and maintains a design and research practice between Austria and Canada. She has multiple European research grants under her credit and has previously served as Assistant professor of Design at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan for more than sixteen years. Her PhD dissertation *Bazaari Design* was recognized for its originality and groundbreaking narratives around vernacular design and practice, highlighting design paradigms of Global South. Her research and teaching focus on decolonising design histories, rewriting Global South design, material culture, and multisensory methods in design research.

Craft, Collaboration, and Post-Independence Furniture Cultures in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has no formal institutional education dedicated to furniture or product design. While fine arts (1948) and architecture (1961) developed pedagogically robust traditions, furniture design has largely remained embedded within craft practice, hereditary knowledge, and informal apprenticeship systems. In this context, highly skilled artisan communities function as alternative institutes of learning—where collaboration between designers and craftspeople not only becomes extremely necessary but serves as a critical form of decolonizing practice. It unfolds the ‘making with hands’ as a methodology by generations; together, they may begin to shape a definition of Bangladeshi design identity.

This paper examines “*Sthiti*” (n. existence): “*Objects in Conversation*,” an exhibition curated by the authors at the Brihatta Art Foundation that brings together furniture and object designs spanning five decades of post-independence Bangladesh. The curatorial research and displaying techniques unpacks the relationship to place while resonating and reveals an act of skill, humility, and resilience. The processes behind Bangladeshi designed objects are often straightforward—marked by a deep respect for people and economy of resources. The acknowledgment of limited raw materials and their transformation, continually generate new forms of competition and opportunity while examining the inherent strength of material traditions. Where production primarily shapes co-designing relationships between designer and artisans.



Muhammad Rahman is an Assistant Professor of Communication Design at the Myron E. Ullman, Jr. School of Design, University of Cincinnati (DAAP). His research examines typography, signage, and everyday artifacts as lenses for understanding urban identity, craft knowledge, and public space. Working across design research and community-engaged practice, his projects explore how vernacular visual cultures and material practices shape contemporary design histories in both South Asia and North America.

Bishwajit Goswami is an architect, designer, and educator based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is an Assistant Professor of Painting in Dhaka University. His work explores the intersections of architecture, furniture design, and craft traditions through object-based inquiry and collaborative making. Engaging closely with artisan knowledge systems and material practices, his projects investigate how contemporary Bangladeshi design negotiates heritage, climate, and resource constraints within evolving cultural and spatial contexts.

Brihatta Art Foundation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is an artist-led platform that embraces creativity as a fluid, transformative force. Through residencies, exhibitions, and community engagement, it fosters inclusive dialogue, collaboration, and continuous learning. Rooted in the belief that art should be accessible and evolving, Brihatta connects diverse voices across borders, nurturing a dynamic and compassionate creative ecosystem.

Crafting Furniture Histories: Recalibrating Design History in a Saudi Craft Ecosystem

Craft is increasingly mobilised in Saudi Arabia as a foundation for developing new forms of design production grounded in local materials, workshop systems, and territorially embedded knowledge. Through educational and institutional initiatives, craft is framed not only as a form of heritage preservation but as a productive cultural infrastructure for contemporary furniture making. This paper examines how such efforts to construct a contemporary craft-based furniture sector challenge dominant Western-centric historiographical models. The study emerges from a collaboration between an Italian design university and an arts institution in Riyadh, where the course *Critical Histories of Furniture Design* was developed to support the institution's ambition to articulate a methodological framework for its initiatives. The collaboration became a site of epistemic negotiation in which historiographical tools were tested against emerging craft-based practices.

Craft theory and material culture approaches were mobilised to analyse historical and contemporary furniture practices, including techniques such as intarsia and marquetry, testing whether analytical categories inherited from Western design history—such as singular authorship, stylistic innovation, and linear industrial progress—remain adequate in this context. Through materially grounded, object-led analysis, the paper shows how these categories become unstable when confronted with distributed knowledge systems, locally embedded materials, and nationally framed processes of craft institutionalisation in Saudi Arabia. Within this framework, the classroom functions as a methodological laboratory in which the analytical tools of furniture history are recalibrated through engagement with a context actively constructing its own productive modernity. This approach foregrounds teaching as an active site of design-historical knowledge production, where design historiography itself can be critically tested and reformulated.



Beatrice Bianco is a Research Fellow at Politecnico di Milano and Project Coordinator in Design Education. She investigates design historiography, craft practices, and material culture within global and intercultural contexts. Trained in Archaeology and Ancient History from the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and an MBA in Cultural Event and Art Market Management, she bridges historical inquiry and contemporary design practice. Founder and Director of Camp Design Gallery (2015–2021), she developed curatorial and research projects focused on contemporary design culture. Her work examines canon formation, craft theory, and the epistemologies of design history, positioning pedagogy as a critical site for historiographical negotiation.

Marinella Ferrara is Professor of Industrial Design at Politecnico di Milano and founder of MADEC (Material Design Culture Research Centre). She leads research at the intersection of material innovation, craftsmanship, and design culture. A member of the PhD Board in Design, she supervises research on innovative materials, circular design, and craft-design relationships. Since earning her PhD under the supervision of Vanni Pasca, she has contributed significantly to the study of design and materials, both historically and contemporarily. Editor-in-chief of *PAD. Pages on Arts & Design*, she has received international recognition, including ADI Design Index selection and the *Compasso d'Oro International Prize*.

Ugandan Vernacular

Vernacular design is preserved in all parts of the world, but Africa is one of the remaining places where it plays a major role in everyday life. In societies hard hit by the double curse of slavery and colonialism, the things we take for granted in the West—health, education, and quality of life—are often out of reach for those earning a dollar a day. But what adversity does teach is resilience and, as with our pioneer forebears, self-reliance.

Metalworking has long been practiced in Africa, but heavy industry outside of mining, has not. The products of industry and advanced technology are generally imported to Africa, but this leaves room for the wide-spread application of craft-based production.

In my three years in Africa documenting vernacular design I encountered numerous examples of craft production, not the least in furniture. The roadside markets of Uganda are rich in examples of affordable furniture. Much of this output mimics general everyday European styles—overstuffed armchairs and wooden bedsteads. Attempts to reproduce Eames-style chairs are less successful than local efforts at cost-cutting. The use of rubber strips from recycled tires in place of metal springs are an instance of local innovation.

Local cushion makers use faux leather, but furniture can also be upholstered in olubuggo, the domestically craft-made fabric known as barkcloth. Traditions triumph in the use of rattan seats for chairs, or in the elegant simplicity of the three-legged coiled-rattan basket stool, or aketebe, an instance of inexpensive utility. Such stools come in different sizes, can be had for 3600 shillings (\$1 US), and are nearly ubiquitous.

It is this combination of resourcefulness and affordability that makes Ugandan furnishings available to most in a populous country with a diminished standard of living. The Ugandan word *okuwangaala*, or longlived, is appropriate to this situation.



David Stairs is a designer and design educator who has taught at Central Michigan University since 1994. Stairs founded *Designers Without Borders* in Africa in 2001, and the *Design-Altruism-Project* online in 2006. In 2019 he released *Digging the Suez Canal With a Teaspoon*, a documentary glimpse at 21st century social design as seen through the eyes of ten contemporary design teachers and practitioners. In 2025 Stairs published *Okuwangaala*, his 20-year research monograph about African vernacular design. He has lectured, taught, and exhibited extensively over the last thirty years.

Design histories and present-day practices of furniture makers of Tamil Nadu, India

The *Thatchars* (traditional carpenters) of Tamil Nadu belong to a larger community of skilled artisans known as the *Kammalar* or *Vishwakarma* community. They worked closely with traditional architects called *Sthapatis*, alongside blacksmiths, stone sculptors and goldsmiths on the construction of temples, residences, furniture and even maritime vessels. Their craft is deeply embedded in the region's social and cultural fabric, with skills transferred inter generationally through rigorous hands-on training. They developed a unique system of measurements and design vocabulary. Traditional texts such as the *Manasara* and *Mayamata*, compiled in the 6th and 11 centuries AD contain details on furniture traditionally produced by the *Vishwakarmas*. Their furniture ranged from culturally significant pieces such as the *oonjal* or swing and the *petti* or storage chest to pieces for daily use such as cots and almirahs. In this paper, through selective literature studies and interviews of traditional carpenters, we can categorise the various kinds of furniture that were traditionally produced in Tamil Nadu and examine their current practices that reflect the changes in regional lifestyles and economy.

The *Thatchar* worked extensively with local wood such as rosewood, *vengai*, mango, teak and fig. This has continued to current times although availability of certain woods such as teak is limited. Traditional texts and cultural practices indicate that the communities in Tamil Nadu often held a deep, symbiotic relationship with the forest. Instead of indiscriminate cutting, traditional practices such as selective harvesting, accompanied by re-planting and allowing space for regeneration ensured the forest ecosystem maintained its balance. The *Atharva Veda* contains a verse that states "Whatever I dig out from you, O Earth! May that have quick regeneration again." The *Vishwakarmas* worked closely with the intangible culture of the local community and carved symbols inspired by flora and fauna of the region into the furniture. Two centuries of colonisation and an influx of Western design ideas and mass-produced imports in recent times, however, have left a significant detrimental impact on their livelihoods. Documenting their work and raising awareness of its cultural significance through institutional support and individual effort can go a long way in preserving their skills today.



Inspired by community-centric and sustainable approaches to design and architecture, **Chandana Reddy** spent several years working in Auroville. An interest in natural materials and building intentionally for the well-being of the users led her to research design principles of Indian architecture. In 2016 -2017, she worked in Studio Naqshbandi and was involved in the research of the 'Vastu Shilpa Shastras' (technical treatise on traditional Indian architecture) and in the design of residential and commercial projects in Puduchery. In 2014-2015, she was involved in a year-long research project to examine the urbanisation-construction-migration nexus spanning five cities in South Asia, funded by the London School of Economics. Her interests in heritage grew and led her to a focused study of traditional Indian architecture since 2018 with senior architect and educator Sashikala Ananth m. She documented the works of traditional architects and sculptors in Tamil Nadu and initiated courses for architecture students and practitioners to raise awareness on the relevance of traditional architecture. She assisted in creating pedagogy frameworks for the M.Arch program specialising in Traditional knowledge systems at Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Pune and other educational programs for Dharmalaya and Indica.

PANEL FOUR: INSTITUTIONS, STUDIOS & DESIGN FORMATION

From Workshop to Design Studio: Anatole Kasskoff and the Emergence of Modern Furniture Design in Bogotá

This paper examines the emergence of the design studio as a key institutional form in the transformation of furniture production in mid-twentieth-century Bogotá. While furniture manufacture in the city remained largely structured around artisanal workshops well into the 1950s, the studio established by Russian-French immigrant designer Anatole Kasskoff introduced a different model of practice: one centered on drawing, project development, and the provision of professional design services independent from fabrication.

Drawing on archival materials from Kasskoff's notebooks and design drawings, the paper reconstructs the studio as a site where craft knowledge, immigrant expertise, and modern design methods intersected. In contrast to the workshop model that dominated local furniture production, Kasskoff's studio reorganized the relationship between conception, representation, and manufacture, positioning design as a distinct professional activity.

The paper focuses in particular on the early formation of Colombian designer Luis Hernando Rodríguez, who worked as an apprentice draftsman in Kasskoff's studio in the mid-1950s. Through this relationship, the studio emerges as a space of knowledge transmission in which methods of drawing, project development, and design thinking circulated through forms of apprenticeship that bridged artisanal practice and modern design culture.

By situating Kasskoff's studio within the broader history of furniture production in Bogotá, the paper argues that the emergence of the design studio functioned as a crucial intermediary structure in the transition from workshop-based craft production to modern furniture design.



César Peña is Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Design at Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá. His research focuses on the history of design in Latin America, particularly the relationships between craft practices, modern design, and material culture in the twentieth century. He leads archival research initiatives on Colombian design, including projects on furniture production, textile design, and photographic archives. His work has been presented in international conferences and exhibitions examining modern design cultures in Latin America and their transnational connections.

Street furniture

This paper examines a pedagogical experiment conducted by the author at CEPT University, Ahmedabad, as part of the Summer-Winter Workshop Series in December 2019. The course emerged from the author's ongoing engagement since 2016 with street vendors who construct, repair, and modify their own chairs in order to continue doing their work on the street. This engagement with scavenged street furniture, began during a residency at Studio-X Mumbai—a space initiated by Columbia University—and has since developed into a broader inquiry into furniture practices within the informal economy.

The paper investigates the porous boundaries between user and maker, and between artisan and designer, that emerge in conditions of material scarcity. Within such environments, constraints often produce inventive *jugaad* solutions in which objects are continuously adapted rather than replaced. Chairs used by vendors are rarely static or finished objects; instead, they evolve through cycles of breakage, repair, and modification. Materials—bits of wood, metal pipes, plastic crates, discarded furniture parts, or rope—are scavenged and attached in improvised ways. The appendages are evidence of its use over time, and add to the sculptural (non-functional) qualities of objects that also question the boundaries of “design” and “art”.

In these contexts, conventional distinctions between form and functional qualities emphasised in design such as beauty and ergonomics have lost their relevance. What matters is the continued capacity of the object to support sitting and working. Against this backdrop, the course asked students—typically trained within design education systems that privilege corporate production, authorship, and mass consumption—to shift their attention to the street. Rather than designing new furniture, students worked directly with vendors and their existing chairs. Through close observation of how these objects support daily labour, students collaborated with vendors to repair, reinforce, and adapt them in ways that responded to actual patterns of use. The paper argues that such encounters foreground repair, improvisation, and incremental modification as legitimate forms of design practice. By examining these practices, the study challenges dominant narratives of design authorship and durability, and suggests that the informal economy offers alternative frameworks for understanding design as an open-ended, collaborative, and materially responsive process.



Ishan Khosla is a visual artist, designer, researcher, and educator based in Dehradun, India. A TED speaker, he holds an MFA in Design from School of Visual Arts, New York. His work explores the margins of art, craft, and design, engaging vernacular cultures and overlooked voices of the Global South. In 2011 he founded the Typecraft Initiative, collaborating with craftspeople, tribal artists, and marginalized communities to create digital typefaces based on traditional art forms. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the London Design Biennale and is held in collections such as San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Kaarkhaney: Collaborative furniture design and craft knowledge in Mumbai

The proposition is based on presenting and offering a critical perspective on a project named *Kaarkhaney*, that investigates contemporary furniture production in Mumbai through collaborative work between European designers and local artisans, examining how craft knowledge, labour relations, and authorship are negotiated within transnational design contexts. By focusing on furniture as a site of experimentation and exchange, the project explores how traditional making practices are mobilized, transformed, and reinterpreted in contemporary design practice.

Kaarkhaney expands research toward furniture design in collaboration with Case Design, a Mumbai-based design studio, and local artisans. Through joint prototyping, material experimentation, and the documentation of workshop practices, the project develops a series of furniture objects that foreground craft processes and shared authorship. A parallel digital archive documents the collaborative making process and the situated knowledge embedded in these practices. By situating furniture within ongoing negotiations between craft traditions, global design economies, and collaborative practice, *Kaarkhaney* contributes to broader discussions on labour, authorship, and the decolonization of design narratives.



Jade Nijman is a Dr. in Visual Cultures at EHESS, affiliated with the Institut Jean Nicod (EHESS-ENS-CNRS). She also holds a double bachelor's degree in History, Art History and Archaeology from Sorbonne University and a master's degree in Arts, Literatures and Languages from EHESS. Her research explores disorientation in exhibition spaces, focusing on visitor behaviour and the improvement of museum experiences. Situated at the intersection of visual studies, human cognition and design theory, her work also engages with oceanic representations and climate-related issues. She has contributed to international workshops and conferences on ocean preservation and works as a behavioural research investigator (eye-tracking specialist) and curator.

Tanay Kandpal is an Indian designer working between the Netherlands and India whose practice explores material cultures and the social dynamics of production. His work spans visual and material mediums, engaging context-specific cultural narratives. He is the founder of TAK, a cross-cultural platform connecting Indian artisanal knowledge with contemporary design through collaborations that encourage material experimentation and equitable knowledge exchange. With experience in creative direction and craft liaison, he works across independent and collaborative projects. Previously studio manager at Casegoods in Mumbai, he oversaw furniture development, custom projects and supply chains for seven years, developing close relationships with artisanal networks and design ecosystems.

Niels Nijman Diffre is a French designer based in Paris. He holds a bachelor's degree in Product Design and Social Innovation from École Boule (2021) and graduated in 2023 from the Geo-Design master's programme at the Design Academy Eindhoven, directed by FormaFantasma. He also completed a master's degree at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) to become a design teacher. Alongside his studies, he worked as an assistant to Samuel Tomatis and held residencies at Abbaye de Maubuisson (France) and the Museu de Arte Popular (Portugal). Influenced by his background in product design, his research-based practice explores objects and the narratives they convey through materiality.

"Supply Uncertain": Craft Production and the Distributed Making of the Planter's Chair

The "planter's chair," known across colonial and postcolonial India by a range of names, from the *charukassera* in Kerala to the *aram kursi* in Bengal, is widely recognised as a symbol of colonial leisure. Yet little is known about how these chairs were actually made. This paper argues that the planter's chair is best understood not as a colonial design object with identifiable authorship, but as a hybrid craft typology shaped by transregional carpentry traditions and dispersed, largely unrecorded labour. Archival sources indicate that these chairs were commonly produced by Indian and Chinese carpenters (the latter often settled within South Asia) active in local and regional furniture trades. Colonial prison workshops were also sites of production. Across different regions, variations in timber, cane work, and structural detailing adapted the form to local materials and practices, while preserving a recognisable reclining typology. The chair's many regional names reflect this absorption into multiple cultural contexts, evidencing local making rather than metropolitan diffusion.

The unevenness of its commercial availability speaks directly to this condition. The Army & Navy Stores catalogue listed it only once, as an "Indian Chair," with the telling note that its "supply [was] uncertain." More reliably available were portable, patented chairs – the "Bartlett" and "Watherston" – which shared the planter's chair's defining feature of armrests that extended into footrests, but were designed for easy transport and catalogue purchase. The Watherston was described as "a perfected pattern of the old Indian chair": an attempt to standardise and commodify a form that had resisted such fixity precisely because it was rooted in local making. By attending to the labour and material knowledge embedded in this furniture form, the paper repositions the planter's chair within broader histories of making in the Global South, recovering a distributed craft history from beneath the surface of colonial consumption.



Rachel Lee is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. Her research examines colonial and postcolonial architecture, design, and material culture, with a focus on migration, heritage, and transnational networks across South Asia and East Africa. Together with Sarita Sundar, she is developing a long-term research project on the planter's chair as a colonial furniture form, exploring its histories of production, circulation, and reinterpretation across plantation worlds. Lee was previously a Mellon Fellow at the Canadian Centre for Architecture and co-edited *Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration* with Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi.

Sarita Sundar is a designer and design historian, leading Hanno, a heritage interpretation and design consultancy. Her research work critically examines culture's visual engagement, from Indian vernacular typography to performance practices. Her publication, "From the Frugal to the Ornate: Stories of the Seat in India," explores the cultural journey of seating in India. Through a 2022-2023 Fulbright Fellowship she conducted research on the intersectional design histories between India and the United States. She continues her fascination for seats through a project that studies the *charukassera*, or Planter's Chair, in collaboration with Dr. Rachel Lee of TU Delft.