

Studio 7.5 – designers of the Mirra™ chair

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

That is how they have 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 hard to find, so they thought about taking another 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.” Thus, the name “Studio 7.5” was born. In the end they managed to locate some office space so they didn’t actually carry out their original idea but the name remained.

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

When disagreements occur, as they inevitably do in such a collaborative endeavour, 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 five people, but if we have two people in an argument, the others can be referees, so it actually makes it easier because you get more input.”

One point Studio 7 all agree on is that 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 behaviour, 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 own way.

