



1. GERRIT RIETVELD'S UTRECHT SOFA IN THE L.A. HOME OF DESIGNER TYLER ELLIS, DESIGNED BY THE ARCHERS. 2. INTERIOR DESIGNER GHISLAINE VIÑAS COVERED A PAIR OF UTRECHT CHAIRS IN DIMORESTUDIO SILK FOR ARCHITECT CHET CALLAHAN'S L.A. HOME. 3. AN UTRECHT CHAIR BY CASSINA. 4. A STOCKHOLM MANSION BY ILSE CRAWFORD. 5. RIETVELD IN 1941.



## Soft Power

*Gerrit Rietveld's Utrecht armchair proves high concept can be comfy*

**T**he best-known designs by Gerrit Rietveld—his circa 1920s De Stijl Red Blue chair, his 1930s Zig-Zag seat—do not exactly scream comfort. In fact, the Dutch architect often delivered his elemental furnishings with removable cushions, which, while rarely documented, were necessary aides for everyday sitting on such rationalist forms.

But in 1935, when designing a mass-producible seat for the Amsterdam department store Metz & Co., Rietveld flipped the script. Once again he reduced a chair to its essentials—armrests bent at 90 degrees to form front legs; a seat tilted up, resting its behind directly on the floor. But this time he upholstered the wooden frame, top to bottom, in brown canvas, adding a white blanket stitch to accentuate the clean-lined geometric shape.

“All of the models by Rietveld stimulated a lot of curiosity,” says Barbara Lehmann, head of the historical archives at Cassina, the Italian furniture brand that acquired the rights to Rietveld’s designs in 1972 and reintroduced this chair, named Utrecht, in 1988, on the centennial of Rietveld’s birth. (Priced from \$4,705, the chair is now available in XL and child’s size.) “In this case, you have a very pure and attractive form that is also comfortable and widely available,” says Lehmann.

It was a masterful market play. Rietveld placed the armchair in several homes, but Metz & Co. sold most direct to consumer, producing Utrecht—and the sofa version Rietveld introduced in 1956—until 1973.

Interior designer Ghislaine Viñas, who recently used two in architect Chet Callahan’s L.A. home, calls it “a chameleon of a chair.” And to her point, Utrecht fits in fashion-forward Loewe boutiques across the globe as well as in OMA’s north delegates lounge for the U.N. building in

New York City. Roman Alonso, of AD100 firm Commune Design, who recently covered a pair in an Hermès plaid for a Santa Cruz house, attributes that versatility, once again, to comfort: “It’s the perfect club chair. You could definitely watch a movie happily while sitting on it.”

*cassina.com* —HANNAH MARTIN

1. RICHARD PETIT. 2. TREVOR TONDRO. 3. COURTESY OF CASSINA. 4. MAGNUS MÅRDING. 5. CENTRAAL MUSEUM DER GEMEENTE UTRECHT.